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King Hassan, portrait of the week by Bahgory 12

Latakia talks

PRIME Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri returned to Cairo yesterday after two rounds of talks with Syrian Vice-President Abdel-Halim Khaddam in the Mediterranean port of Latakia. *Ganzouri had* arrived in Syria Tuesday afternoon at the head of a delegation *including Information* Minister Safwat El-Sherif, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa and *President Hosni Mu*barak's political adviser Osama El-Baz.

According to the Middle East News Agency, the talks focused on the latest developments in the Middle East peace process as well as bilateral relations.

Foreign Minister Moussa, accompanied by his Syrian counterpart Al-Sharaa, flew from Latakia to Rabat to attend a meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference's Jerusalem Committee, opening today in the Moroccan capital.

GCC call

SAUDI ARABIA and five other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) slammed Israel yesterday *for building a new Jewish* settlement in East Jerusalem and urged Arab nations to reassess their relations with *Israel. The call, made at the* end of a two-day meeting in Riyadh of GCC foreign ministers, was the first such *appeal by Gulf countries* since 1991. Oman and Qatar are the only members of the GCC to have embarked on a process of normalisation with Israel.

The French news agency AFP reported Kuwaiti University students yesterday burned Israeli flags during the first anti-Israeli demonstration in the emirate in six years. Several Kuwaiti opposition MPs participated in the demonstration.

UAE cabinet

UNITED Arab Emirates President Sheikh Zaid bin Sultan Al-Nahayan named a distinguished financier. Obaid bin Saif Al-Nasseri, as oil minister in the country's first cabinet reshuffle in six years. Nasseri replaces Rakad bin Salem bin Rakad who served as acting oil minister for the past two years. Nasseri held senior posts with the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority and the National Bank of Abu Dhabi prior to his cabinet assignment.

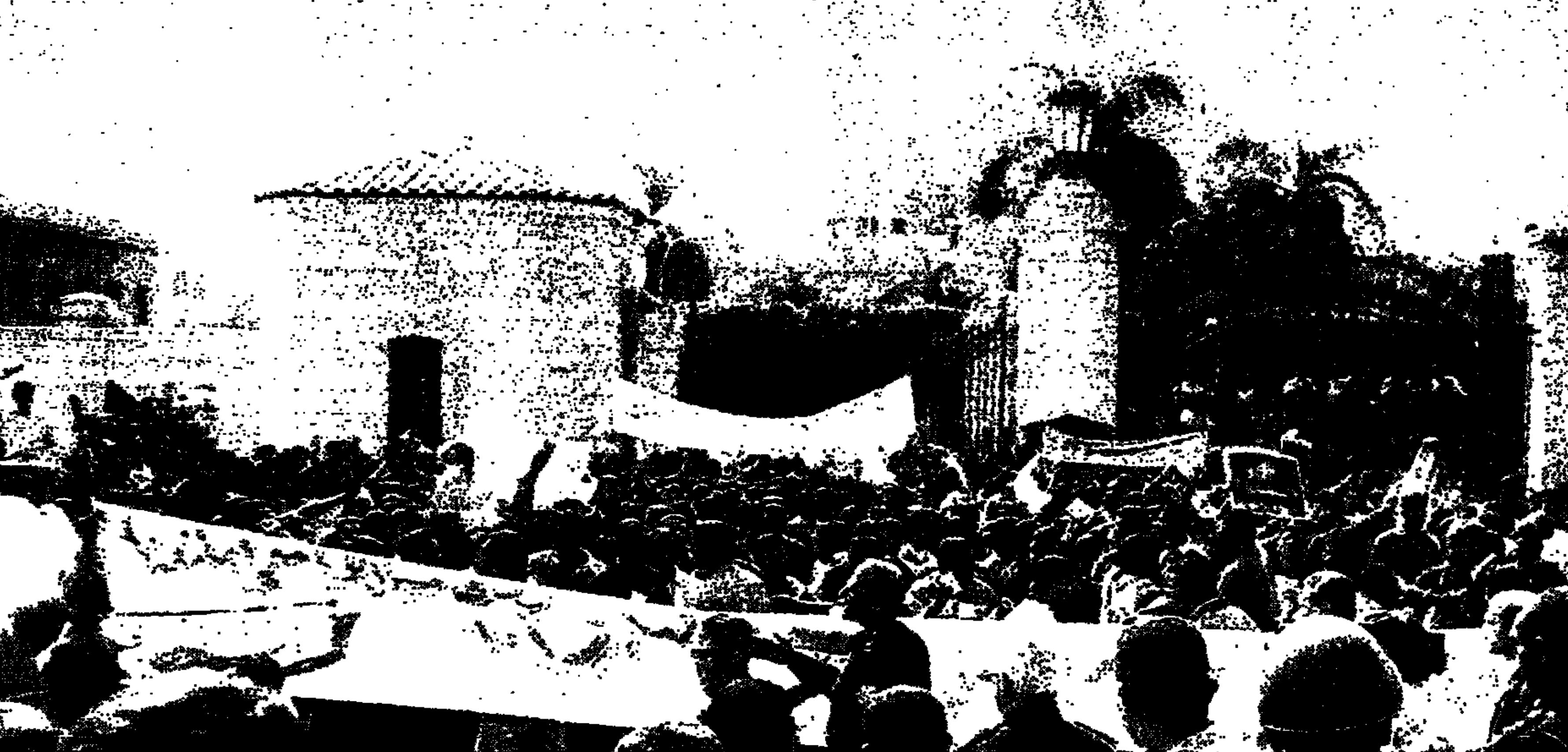
The appointment was part of a reshufle, announced on Tuesday, which brought seven new faces into the UAE government, and is not expected to produce any change in the country's oil policy, experts *told Reuters*.

Bahrain trial

BAHRAIN's State Security Court yesterday sentenced the first batch of Islamist militants accused of attempting to topple the country's ruling Al-Khalifa family with backing from Iran. The court passed prison sentences ranging between three *and 15 years on 15* men and acquitted 11 others.

The Associated Press reported that the 26 men were *among a total of 81* involved in the case, first uncovered last June. Twenty-two defendants are still at *lqrge and will be tried in* absentia. The government accused the suspects of being members of the military *wing of* Hizbullah-Bahrain.

INSIDE



Jerusalem fury

Thousands of Cairo University students took part in a week of demonstrations against Israeli policies

Process breakdown?

As US envoy Dennis Ross arrived in the region last night, there was little hope he would succeed in salvaging the peace process. Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, reports Tarek Hassan **from Gaza, are now opting for resistance rather than negotiations**

Prospects of a new US peace mission won a cold response from Palestinians yesterday, with protesters burning the American flag and negotiators saying the effort would fail unless President Bill Clinton's envoy called Israel to order.

The Palestinians demand a halt to Israel's construction of a Jewish neighbourhood in Arab East Jerusalem. Israel, in turn, insists that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat halt stone-throwing protests and rein in Islamist militants before peace talks resume.

Clinton's Middle East envoy, Dennis Ross, was expected to stop over in Rabat last night for a meeting with Arafat before flying to Israel , US officials said.

A suicide bomb attack claimed by Islamist militants killed three Israelis in a Tel Aviv café last Friday and stone-throwing demonstrations have escalated in several parts of the West Bank druing the past week.

However, there were signs that Arafat was moving to lower the tensions ahead of Ross's visit. In the West Bank town of Bethlehem, Palestinian police formed a human chain yesterday to keep dozens of Palestinian protesters away from Israeli troops guarding an Israeli enclave in the city.

Arafat's West Bank security chief, Jibril Rajoub, who on Tuesday rejected Israeli demands to curb the riots, personally supervised crowd control, shouting at the demonstrators to move back and ordering his bodyguards to help the police.

Clashes erupted in other parts of the West Bank that remain under full Israeli control. Israeli troops fired tear gas and rubber bullets at Palestinian demonstrators.

The chief Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat, said Ross would only produce results if the envoy focused on substance, rather than procedure, such as arranging a summit between Arafat and Netanyahu.

"We want Mr Ross to respect the signature of Mr Clinton on the [peace] agreement and to stand up and clearly tell the bulldozers to stop," Erekat told the Palestinian legislative council. "The real reasons for the whirlwind of violence and counter-violence are the Israeli measures — building settlements."

Arafat was on a weeklong visit to Asia during the recent violence. US officials made several attempts to locate him, and finally contacted him in Bangladesh. Responding to a telephone call Tuesday night from Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Arafat agreed to fly home to meet with Ross.

A US official said Ross will raise Israeli security concerns with the Palestinians, and speak to Israel about ways to restore the Palestinians' confidence in the peace process.

David Bar-Illan, a senior Netanyahu aide, claimed Arafat was using violence as a tactic to pressure Israel and must instead signal Islamic militants that he will not allow terror attacks like the Tel Aviv cafe bombing.

Arafat complained in a press interview published in Bangladesh that the US administration was not supporting him fully. "The present crisis is the most serious one facing the Palestinian people in the recent past," Arafat said. "The crisis will have its ramifications globally if not resolved immediately."

According to Nabil Shaath, minister of international Cooperation in the Palestinian Authority, an Arab plan for saving Jerusalem would come up for discussion at a meeting in Rabat, Morocco, of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference's Jerusalem Committee, due to open today. Arafat is expected to attend the meeting chaired by Morocco's King Hassan.

A wave of frustration and disillusionment has swept Palestinian circles in the absence of a firm Palestinian stand to confront the Israeli government's expansionist policy and its continued settlement building.

The Fatah movement in the West Bank has called on Palestinians to resist the occupation "using every means available".

"It is unacceptable for the Palestinian security service to serve the interests of Israeli security in light of the recent developments," Marwan Barghouti, secretary-general of Fatah in the West Bank told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Resisting Israeli policies by every means available and suspending negotiations with the Israelis have now become a necessity."

Israeli officials accuse the Palestinian Authority (PA) of encouraging the protests. But the Palestinian police are busy trying to keep the demonstrators away from the Israeli troops.

Nabil Amr, adviser to Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, believes that "resistance must be restrained" and "confined within legitimate means of national protest." He added that protest strategy should be united under one umbrella.

Kamal Al-Sharafi, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), feels the need to dispel the illusion prevailing among Western leaders that following the Hebron agreement, peace has come and their interests are no longer under threat.

Meanwhile, Yehya Moussa, secretary-general of the Islamic Salvation Party (ISP), affiliated to Hamas, called for the suspension of negotiations between the PA and the Israeli government. Instead he advocates upholding the principle of "no peace with settlements."

Moussa believes that "at this stage there is an urgent need for a comprehensive Palestinian national programme." He says the full potential of the Palestinian people — encompassing political parties, nationalist and Islamic forces — must be mobilised to launch a comprehensive programme in response to Israel's strategy.

Salah Al-Taamari, a PLC member for Bethlehem, said that "it is only the Palestinians that can determine the final outcome." One way of confronting settlement activities, according to Al-Taamari, is to redirect Palestinian investment to areas which are likely targets for settlements, rather than focusing on major cities

Road to secular power

SPLA leader John Garang, directing a large-scale offensive against the forces of the Islamist government in Sudan, spoke *to* **Gamal Nkrumah**







Southern Sudan teeters on the edge of more bloodbaths. Sudanese government Antonov warplanes dropped six bombs *on the rebel-held southern* Sudanese town of Maridi on Monday. A 20-year-old woman was instantly killed and 13 others were injured. Innocent civilians are mercilessly butchered. The war is Sudan's economic downfall.

After numerous attempts to track him down, I finally managed to reach John Garang, the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), on his mobile phone earlier this week. He was somewhere in the bush not far from Juba. Garang talked excitedly about toppling the Islamist-led regime and the modalities of relinquishing power. "Today, some three hours ago, our missiles shot down one Sudanese army high-altitude Antonov bomber," Garang told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "We are operating 40 kilometres south of Juba — in a town that's actually called *Kilo Arbaeen* [40 kilometres]."

The SPLA captured Yei on 12 March. "Our latest offensive started on 9 March. We have captured the garrison towns of Kaya, Bazi, Morogo, Limbe, Lianya and Yei. *The Sudanese government denied that* its armed forces had lost Yei to the SPLA. But independent eyewitnesses confirmed our claim. Reporters from Agence France Presse, Reuters and other Western news agencies came to Yei and interviewed me," Garang said.

However, a pro-Sudanese government breakaway SPLA faction, led by Kerubino Kuanyen, was reported to have inflicted heavy casualties on Garang's own mainstream SPLA in recent fighting in *the Wuruk* area of Warab Province. Kuanyen, an ethnic Dinka like Garang, is active in Bahr Al-Ghazal Province. But the SPLA leader dismissed Kuanyen's *threat. Kuanyen, he said,* is "a *nuisance*, but not a danger to the SPLA."

But in the seething socio-economic and politico-military climate of Sudan, interfactional fighting among southerners could spell disaster. Some analysts fear that the conflict between different southern groups could further splinter the already fractured country — Africa's largest in area. But Garang sounded optimistic. "We launched this operation two weeks ago. We had been preparing for this operation for 16 months," he said.

Garang managed to convince the northern Sudanese opposition groups that they should take up arms against the government. "They realise now that the armed struggle is the only way to overthrow the regime," Garang said. The SPLA is now part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) — an umbrella grouping uniting Sudanese opposition forces. Within the NDA, Garang is in charge of military leadership, while the Democratic Unionist Party leader, Mohamed Othman Al-Mirghani, is the *NDA president overseeing political matters* and Umma Party leader Sadig Al-Mahdi, who bitterly fought Garang's SPLA until 1989, runs the NDA's diplomatic offensive.

*Garang said that he is in regular tele*phone contact with his allies in the NDA, especially Al-Mahdi and Al-Mirghani. His relationships with his one-time enemies in the NDA are deepening, he said. "Our alliance is no longer simply tactical. We have common interests and we all want a new Sudan," Garang said. "Our principal task is to create the objective conditions for fundamental change in Khartoum. We want to create a new Sudan — one which we can all identify with. We are members of the NDA. We are playing an effective role in the NDA."

Garang, a suave intellectual who obtained a doctoral degree in the US, has always *been convinced that the untenable situation* in Sudan could only be changed by armed struggle. Some regard Garang as an anti-Arab and anti-Muslim secessionist, bent on dividing Sudan. Garang vigorously denies the charges, and many of his own people regard him as an idealist because of his strong advocacy of a united Sudan. "No one could claim I have been untrue to my belief in a united Sudan," he said.

"We are not a secessionist movement. We are for justice and equality for all Sudanese people irrespective of race, religion and ethnic origin. The Sudanese government says that it is defending the unity of Sudan. It is not. The National Islamic Front (NIF) government says it is defending Islam. It is not. We are not against Islam. We do not threaten Islam. Rather, it is the Sudanese government that has declared *jihad* against fellow Muslims. It is the NIF government that constitutes a real threat to Islam and the interests of Muslims."

Garang boasted that Yasser Arman, the SPLA chief information spokesman based *in the Eritrean capital, Asmara, is a cousin* of Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir. "We in the SPLA believe in a united, democratic and secular Sudan," he said.

"The very first SPLA national convention unanimously elected Commander Yousuf Kuo Mekki as convention chairman. It was significant because he is an ethnic Nuba, a Muslim from northern Sudan. True to our vision of a new Sudan, the first SPLA convention was attended by representatives of both northern and southern Sudan. From northern Sudan, the Missiriya Arabs sent 12 delegates to the convention, the Ingessina of Blue Nile Province sent 12, and the Nuba 60," Garang said.

And where will it all end? Garang has few doubts. "Juba will eventually fall. Both Juba and the NIF government will fall. We shall take Juba. Eventually even Khartoum will fall."

Municipal ballot promises few surprises

The ruling NDP appears confident of an overwhelming victory in the approaching municipal elections, and opposition gains are bound to be marginal. **Amira Howeidy** reports

The posters and banners in the streets of Cairo and other major cities are perhaps the only obvious indication of an otherwise low-key campaign for municipal council elections,. set for 7 April. The opposition parties are showing limited interest in the event, and, contrary to earlier predictions that the number of candidates could soar to 100,000, only around 58,000 men and women have nominated themselves, according to a source at the Ministry of Local Administration. They will be competing for 47,382 seats on 1,507 councils in 26 governorates.

Registration of candidates began on 23 February and ended on 4 March. But the exact number of candidates will not be known until 29 March, which is the deadline for withdrawals. The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), which nominated around 47,000 candidates, appears to be confident of a landslide victory.

"The negative experience of the opposition parties in the 1995 parliamentary elections dampened our enthusiasm for the coming elections," said Hussein Abdel-Razek, a leading member of the leftist Tagammu Party, explaining why Tagammu is fielding only 850 candidates in the election battle.

Although Tagammu won five seats in the parliamentary elections, it fared much better than the Labour, Nasserist and Liberal parties which together won only four seats.

Labour's Abdel-Hamid Barakat claimed that his Islamist-oriented party was fielding 3,000 candidates. "Normally this number would have been much higher, but we were discouraged by the results of the 1995 elections," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Moreover, he added, potential candidates were intimidated by the arrest in January of 28 party members on charges of belonging to the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood.

Mustafa Kamel Murad, leader of the Liberal Party, went further, accusing the government of placing obstacles in the way of candidates. "We were surprised that the government was demanding unnecessary documents from potential candidates wishing to register themselves," he said. These included papers attesting to the candidate's profession and others proving that the candidate has no police record. Candidates, he added, had only one week to fulfil these requirements, "and naturally many of them could not meet the deadline."

As a result, nearly 2,000 potential candidates decided not to run, leaving another 2,000 "whose chances of achieving anything are very slim," Murad said.

"If this is the situation on the eve of the elections, what will it be like on election day?" he asked.

A source in the Ministry of Local Administration rejected Murad's allegations. "These electoral procedures have always been in force and were applied in previous local council elections," the source said. He explained that before any elections are held, the Interior Ministry makes an announcement listing the documents which potential candidates should provide. "This announcement was made on 6 February and registration began on the 23 and continued until 4 March. So candidates had ample time to get their papers together," the source said.

The Wafd Party, which won six seats in the parliamentary elections, announced two months ago that it would boycott the municipal ballot. According to Abdel-Moneim Hussein, a member of the Wafd's supreme committee, "the party does not wish to exhaust itself with elections which are bound to be rigged. The Wafd has learned from the experience of the parliamentary elections in which we should have won 70 seats. We learned to save our energy, money and cadres for more important matters."

The illegal Muslim Brotherhood, meanwhile, informed its members that it was up to them to decide whether they wanted to contest the elections. "These elections are useless and insignificant," said deputy Supreme Guide Maamoun El-Hodeibi. "Under martial law, it is very difficult to imagine that an event such as local elections could genuinely reflect the true balance of political forces."

Criticism of election procedures came even from the head of the NDP's local administration committee, Abdel-Fattah El-Dali. He told the *Weekly* that modifications were needed. "The voters' lists are not accurate and the nine hours permitted for casting ballots are never enough, especially with the massive number of candidates running in any municipal elections," he said.

El-Dali said opposition complaints that the 1995 parliamentary elections had demonstrated the innate unfairness of the Egyptian electoral process were unjustified. "One cannot jump to conclusions concerning future events by recalling the past. If anyone is to be blamed for the inevitable victory of the NDP in the municipal elections, it will be the opposition parties themselves, who kept a low profile," El-Dali said.

Since competition appears to be limited, the elections are expected to be accompanied by less violence than the 1995 ballot. Nevertheless, the Centre for Human Rights Legal Aid is preparing for the event. It has recruited 50 lawyers to provide legal aid for candidates and voters. On election day, the centre will send additional volunteers to act as observers in 'hot' areas, such as Giza, Dokki, Heliopolis and Bab Al-Shariya — all in the Greater Cairo area. According to the centre's director, Hisham Mubarak, the elections should go smoothly "since the results are generally known beforehand and competition is limited."

Where should Ramses stand?

A decision has been taken to move the colossus of Ramses II from Ramses Square but, as **Rana Allam** reports, officials are in a quandary over possible new sites

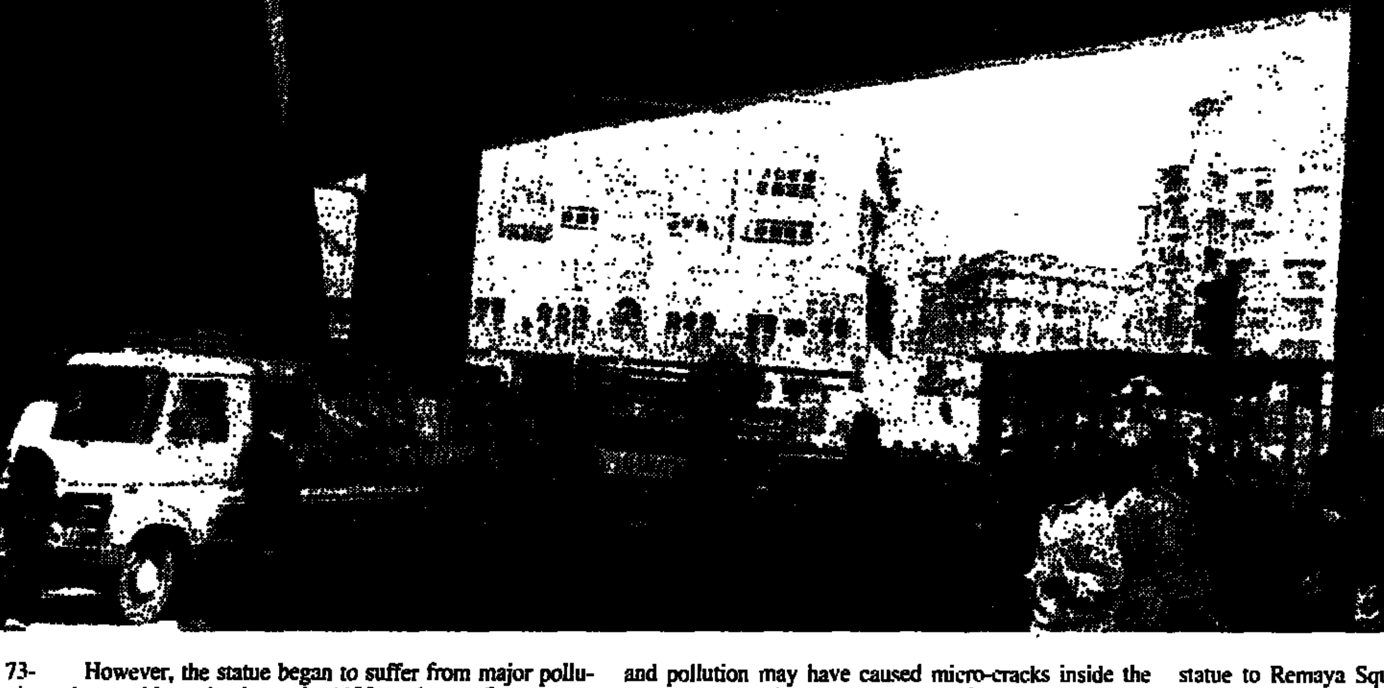


photo: Antoine Albert

The government has finally decided to move the 73-ton granite statue of Ramses II from its location in Ramses Square, named after the pharaoh, where it has stood for more than 40 years. The decision was taken by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri after touring the perenially-crowded and polluted square, which is also the location of Cairo's main railway station. Culture Minister Farouk Hosni immediately established a committee of experts to choose a new site and examine the logistics of moving the statue, which is 11 metres high and 3.7 metres wide.

The statue was brought to the square in 1955 from its original location in the village of Mit Rahina in the Giza Governorate, south of Cairo. It required the cooperation of the armed forces, the department of antiquities and a German company to transport the massive object and the journey took two weeks. But it made it possible for millions of Cairenes to see this great Pharaonic symbol of leadership.

However, the statue began to suffer from major pollution problems in the early 1980s, when a flyover was built above the square and an underground metro line beneath it. A permanent pall of dust and soot began to hang over the area, and traffic vibrations shook the statue, which is by now hardly visible amidst the bridges, traffic and crowd.

"The statue has been exposed to a high level of pollution," commented Zahi Hawass, head of the antiquities sector for Greater Cairo. "Such monuments are not meant to be displayed in public squares, but in places where their spiritual value can be safeguarded."

"It has to be moved," agreed Hassan Fahmi, head of the Antiquities' Engineering Centre at Cairo University. But moving such a colossus is not an easy task, he added, "particularly since the monument must have suffered from the environmental changes."

A comprehensive examination of the statue should be made first, Fahmi said. He explained that the vibrations and pollution may have caused micro-cracks inside the monument and, in that case, it must first be restored and strengthened before it can be moved. "One mistake would damage the statue," Fahmi stressed.

Hawass, on the other hand, saw no cause for concern. "The statue was moved safely 40 years ago. With today's technology, there should be no problems," he said.

Although the committee in charge of the move has not yet determined the new site, several possible locations have been suggested in the past. One of them, outside the new Cairo Opera House, appears to have been rejected. The other options are: at the foot of the Giza Pyramids, where a new museum of ancient antiquities is to be built, or in Remaya Square, at the beginning of the Cairo-Fayoum road.

Both Fahmi and Hawass believe that it would be best to take the statue back to its original home, Mit Rahina. "Since there is no way to apply the law and stop the pollution of the streets and squares, the idea of moving the statue to Remaya Square should be rejected," Fahmi said. He and Hawass have recommended building an open air museum in Mit Rahina where the colossus would be displayed alongside other Ramses statues found there.

Meanwhile, the Cairo Traffic Department has already drawn up new plans for Ramses Square. "The statue is not a reason for the traffic jams in this area," said Mohamed El-Nazer, head of the department. However, he acknowledged that the busy square was no longer a suitable location for the monument. "It should be placed where everybody can see it, but not in Ramses Square," he said.

The new plan will streamline the motorised and pedestrian traffic in the area outside the railway station. A new route to Wekalat Al-Balah will open, along with new connections to Al-Galaa Street— thus easing the traffic load on the Nile Corniche and Ramses Street.

Wissa on trial

RAOUF WISSA, owner of the Heliopolis building that collapsed last October killing 64 people, went on trial last Saturday before the Supreme State Security Court, reports **Mona El-Nahhas**.

Following a procedural session, the court postponed hearings until 24 May. Wissa, 60, is accused of illegally adding five storeys to the building, which was built with eight floors. Although the extra storeys were added 20 years ago, the committee of engineers investigating the disaster nevertheless found that they were partly responsible for the collapse, because the structure and columns of the building could not support them. The court turned down a request by Wissa's defence lawyer for his release on health grounds and ordered that he be remanded in custody. Wissa was arrested immediately after the collapse.

Standing trial with Wissa are three other defendants: Abdel-Aziz Fahmi, secretary-general of the Central Bank, and Ahmed Mahmoud Riad and Ashraf Abdou El-Bukhari — two construction engineers. Fahmi is accused of ordering structural alterations on a ground floor apartment owned by the Central Bank, which also contributed to the collapse. The two engineers are accused of carrying out the alterations. The three had earlier been released on bail.

The October collapse, the third to hit Heliopolis in five years, sounded the alarm about the mushrooming of construction violations. As a result, Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri issued a martial order imposing tougher penalties. Offences are now punishable by a minimum 10 years, imprisonment with hard labour if the violation results in the death of one person or more. The martial order also set a minimum sentence of one year's imprisonment for making alterations or adding extra floors without obtaining a license.

Journalists reprimanded

THE PRESS SYNDICATE has reprimanded six of its members for meeting Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu during his visit to Cairo on 5 March. The six met the Israeli premier along with three other Egyptian intellectuals.

A statement issued by the Syndicate's council last Friday criticised Osama El-Ghazali Harb, chief editor of *Al-Siyassa Al-Dawliya* (International Politics), Taha Abdel-Alim and Hala Mustafa of Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, and writers Abdel-Sattar El-Tawila, Shawki El-Sayed and Mohamed Ali Ibrahim, for acting in violation of resolutions taken by the Syndicate's General Assembly. These resolutions prohibit any form of professional or personal contact with Israeli media, institutions or persons.

The statement said this meeting had come at a time when the Israeli government was taking extremist and provocative positions. The syndicate reminded all members that they should adhere to the General Assembly's resolutions and affirmed its opposition to normalising relations with Israel.

Numerous Egyptian journalists and writers have visited Israel since the late President Anwar El-Sadat made his landmark visit to Jerusalem in 1977, but none of them have faced disciplinary action from the syndicate.

Cinema under attack

Can actors be held responsible for a film's content? A court ruling, imposing suspended prison sentences on an actress, actor and a producer for inciting vice, has caused ructions in movie circles, reports **Hanan Sabra**

Actors, actresses, directors, producers and others involved in the film industry have reacted with alarm to a court verdict finding an actor, actress and producer guilty of inciting vice for their parts in the making of *Abul-Dahab*, a film released last year.

A misdemeanours court sentenced actress Maali Zayed and actor Mamdouh Wafi to one year's imprisonment, the sentences to be suspended, and ordered each to pay a LE500 fine. The film's producer Samir Abdel-Azim received a one-month suspended sentence and a LE100 fine. All three are appealing against their sentences in a higher court.

The court objected to four scenes in the film, showing Zayed and Wafi in bed, which, it ruled, incited vice. The censorship authorities claim that these scenes were not submitted to the Censorship Board for approval, but were added after an original copy had been approved by the Board.

Producer Abdel-Azim, on the other hand, claimed that the four scenes were approved by Adel Abboud, acting chairman of the Censorship Board at the time, but that he later reversed his decision.

"I submitted the script to Abboud, he approved the story and director Karim Diaeddin began shooting," Abdel-Azim said. "After shooting was completed, I submitted the film again for censorship and it was approved."

But after the film was released and shown in several cinemas for nine weeks, Abdel-Azim alleges that the censor changed his mind. "He asked me to remove the four scenes but I refused," he said, ascribing Abboud's change of heart to "problems" between him and others aspiring to occupy the post of chief censor.

Zayed and Wafi insist that, as actors, they are not accountable for the content of a film. This responsibility, they argue, rests with the director.

"I received the script, carrying the censorship office's seal of approval, and then signed a contract with the producer," Zayed said. "When shooting began, obviously the director was in charge. I have to follow his instructions and I cannot refuse his orders. That would be a violation of the contract between me and the producer."

Wafi said that all those involved in the cinema industry know that once shooting is completed, the film is submitted to the Censorship Board for approval, and that the Board has the authority to remove any scenes it finds objectionable.

The content of a film is the responsibility of the writer and the director, he continued, and the producer is responsible for submitting it to the censorship authorities. The actors, on the other hand, are not responsible and "should not face the threat of being reported to the vice squad."

Actors whose work contravenes censorship regulations should be reported to the Syndicate of Cinema Workers, Wafi argued, "but should not be sent to jail, like thieves and drug traffickers, for a film scene."

The syndicate's chairman, Abdel-Ghaffar Ouda, said that he was surprised by the court's sentence. "It is the first time that actors and actresses have faced the threat of imprisonment for their part in a film scene," he said. "According to the censorship law, the responsibility rests with the producer and director."

Director Diaeddin said: "After shooting was completed, I handed the film to the producer. My role ended here. It is the producer's responsibility."

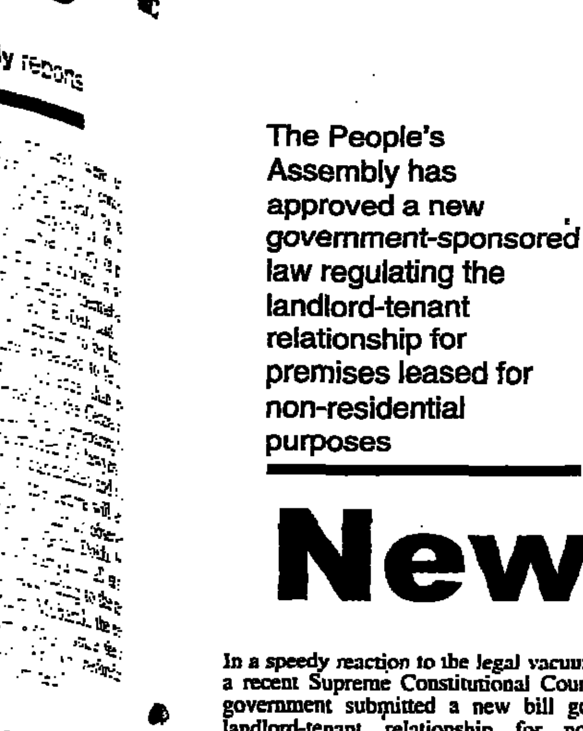
According to Ali Abu Shadi, the current chairman of the Censorship Board, a copy of the film, without the four controversial scenes, was approved by the Board last April. "But after the film was released, we learned that the four scenes had been added to the original copy. We filed a complaint with the police against producer Abdel-Azim and the film's distributor, Mohamed Hassan Ramzi. According to the censorship law, the actors and actresses are not responsible."

Labib Muawwad, Zayed's and Wafi's lawyer, also affirmed that a film's content is the responsibility of the producer and director. "The 1961 law dealing with morality offences cannot be invoked against a work of art because art is creative expression and thus protected by the Constitution. Artistic works are only subject to the censorship law," he said.



With actor Mamdouh Wafi by her side, actress Maali Zayed addresses a meeting of cinema workers held to show solidarity with them

هكذا من الأصل



The People's Assembly has approved a new government-sponsored law regulating the landlord-tenant relationship for premises leased for non-residential purposes





Justice Minister Farouk Seif El-Nasr [right] addresses the People's Assembly during the debate of the commerical tenancy law and then [left] chats with Zakaria Azmi, chief of the presidential staff

New law for commercial tenancy

In a speedy reaction to the legal vacuum created by a recent Supreme Constitutional Court ruling, the government submitted a new bill governing the landlord-tenant relationship for non-residential premises to the People's Assembly on Monday.

The Court ruled in February that a 1977 law sanctioning the continuation of leases on commercial and trade premises after the death of their original tenants was discriminatory against landlords, and therefore unconstitutional.

The new draft was designed to redress the balance in the landlord-tenant relationship, the government said. Although the five-article draft came under fire from a handful of deputies on the grounds that it could be quashed, like the previous law, by the Supreme Constitutional Court, the bill quickly won the Assembly's approval.

The new law makes the continuation of a lease after the original tenant's death subject to two conditions. The first is that the inheritor should be a first or second degree relative of the original tenant. The second is that the premises should be used for the same kind of commercial or industrial activity.

The law also provides for rent increases by various ratios, assessed on the basis of the date of the building's construction. The Assembly revised these ratios to provide for greater increases before it approved the bill. In the final version, the rent for units in buildings constructed before 1 January 1944 will be increased eightfold; from 1 January 1944 to 4 November 1961, the rent will be increased by fivefold; from 5 November 1961 to 6 October 1973, the rent will be quadrupled; from 7 October 1973 to 9 September 1977, rent will be trebled; from 10 September 1977 to 30 January 1996, rent will be raised by 10 per cent. In addition, the new rental value of all units, regardless of the date of construction, will be subject to an annual 10 per cent hike.

Although the draft eventually won an overwhelming majority, several deputies cautioned that the Supreme Court would find fault with it. Ibrahim El-Nimiki, deputy chairman of the Assembly's Legislative and Constitutional Committee, pointed out that the Court had thrown out the 1977 law because it discriminated against landlords by sanctioning the continuity of the lease contract following the death of the original tenant. "The problem is that the new law still leads us into equally hazy entanglements with perpetuity," El-Nimiki said. "It provides for the continuity of the lease contract, provided the inheritors are first or second degree relatives of the original tenant. This means that the landlord is stripped once again of the right to lease his premises in the way he likes. He may even die while the tenant's inheritors continue to enjoy the legal right to use the premises."

El-Nimiki argued that the best way to respond to the Constitutional Court's ruling is to fully liberalise the landlord-tenant relationship for non-residential units, in accordance with the Civil Code. This would lead to relationships which are "the result of free negotiation between the two parties, as is the case with the landlord-tenant relationship for agricultural land," he said.

Abdel-Aziz Heiba, an independent MP, agreed with El-Nimiki, recalling that about 28 laws on landlord-tenant relations have been passed during the past 50 years, each of them giving the government the right to intervene in some way or another in the relationship. "The Constitutional Court's ruling is very important because it suggests that this relationship should be regulated by free negotiation between the two parties," Heiba said. "But as a matter of fact, this law removes the right to negotiate rents freely. The best response to the Court's decision is to let this relationship be governed by the Civil Code."

Minister of Justice Farouk Seif El-Nasr, responding to El-Nimiki's and Heiba's criticism, expressed confidence that the Constitutional Court would have no reason to quarrel with the new law. He pointed out that Article 601 of the Civil Code states that the lease contract should not be terminated following the death of the original tenant. Besides, the new law gives the landlord the right to terminate the contract if the inheritors are not using the premises for the same activity as the original tenant. "The law also redresses the balance between landlords and tenants by raising rents according to various ratios," Seif El-Nasr said.

Another group of deputies argued that the government should also use the Constitutional Court's ruling to liberalise the landlord-tenant relationship for old buildings used for residential purposes. Seif El-Nasr responded that the government was preparing a new law in this connection.

Zakaria Azmi, chief of the presidential staff, pointed out that the new law does not cover non-residential units leased to government and public sector offices. Seif El-Nasr concurred that the ruling of the Constitutional Court covered units leased for commercial and trade purposes only; therefore, government and public sector units would remain subject to the provisions of the 1977 law. Kamal El-Shazli, minister of state for parliamentary affairs, said that Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri has issued instructions that all units leased to the government should be handed back to their landlords.

El-Shazli said the new law had been drawn up in response to the Constitutional Court's ruling "and did not cover all cases. A new comprehensive law will be submitted soon to the house, covering all aspects of the landlord-tenant relationship for non-residential units." He also affirmed that by protecting shopkeepers from eviction, the law was attaching a special importance to social stability.

Khaled Mohieddin, chief of the leftist-oriented Tagammu Party, objected to the 10 per cent annual rent rise provided by the law. "This increase could lead to rampant inflation at a time when we were expecting it to drop to four per cent a year," said Mohieddin.

And Sameh Ashour, representative of the Democratic Nasserist Party, objected to both the Constitutional Court's ruling and the new law. "The ruling will negatively affect more than 25 million citizens who live on the revenues of around 776,000 units leased for non-residential purposes," said Ashour. He added that the ratios for the rent increases should be reconsidered.

An Algerian connection?



Jamila Maali Al-Falaki

An Algerian woman has been arrested for allegedly acting as a go-between for Islamic militants in this country and one of their London-based leaders. **Jailan Halawi** reports

An Algerian woman, Jamila Maali Al-Falaki, has been arrested for liaising between members of the militant Jihad group in Egypt and Yasser El-Serri, one of their London-based leaders, the interior ministry announced last weekend.

The ministry's statement said that a weapon was seized from her along with cash and documents.

According to the statement, Al-Falaki was recruited by El-Serri whom the ministry described as "one of Jihad's most active leaders". He was sentenced to death in absentia for involvement in the 1993 abortive attempt on the life of then Prime Minister Atef Sidki.

El-Serri now lives in London, heading a so-called Islamic Observation Centre for Human Rights. After recruiting Al-Falaki, the ministry said, he commissioned her to deliver instructions to the families of detained militants and three of their lawyers.

Security sources said Al-Falaki was appointed for the job as she paid a visit to the British Embassy in Tunis to obtain a visa. In London, she first met with one of El-Serri's assistants and then with El-Serri himself who asked her to visit Egypt and deliver his instructions to detained militants through their defence lawyers — Montasser El-Zayyat, Mahmoud Abdel-Shafi and Saad Hasaballah.

The sources said that security authorities, with permission from the state security prosecution, were able to tape long-distance telephone conversations between Al-Falaki and El-Serri, in which the latter provided information about money he had transferred from London and how it should be distributed among detained militants and their families.

The sources said Al-Falaki told interrogators that El-Zayyat and Abdel-Shafi helped her meet with families of the detained militants. Moreover, Abdel-Shafi provided her with a pistol and Hasaballah arranged for her to meet with the wife of Helmi Al-Azazi, one of the leaders of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood who is serving a prison sentence.

In a long-distance telephone interview with El-Serri in London, he strongly denied the accusations contained in the interior ministry's statement, describing them as "illogical."

"How can I recruit and commission a woman I had never seen before in my life?" he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

El-Serri explained that as head of the Islamic Observation Centre, he receives telephone calls from all over the world and "Al-Falaki might have telephoned, seeking help or advice."

"I challenge anyone to produce solid proof that I transferred money to any man or woman in Egypt," El-Serri added.

Asked about his relationship with El-Zayyat, El-Serri said they only met in the course of seminars held in Britain. "If Egyptian police are so sure that El-Zayyat is so much involved, why didn't they arrest him or question him until now?" he asked.

El-Serri said the case of the Algerian woman "is a media stunt which the government wants to use to damage our image in the eyes of the world."

El-Serri said his group, Vanguards of Conquest, does not use violence and denied that it was an offshoot of Jihad, which is led by Ayman El-Zawahri.

For his part, El-Zayyat told the *Weekly* that he had no relationship whatsoever with Al-Falaki or El-Serri. "As far as I know, this Algerian woman is married to an Egyptian, has six children and resides in Cairo," he said.

El-Zayyat denied that he had offered the woman any kind of help. "I never saw the woman and so how could I have arranged meetings between her and others?" he said.

Egyptians protest in Jerusalem

A visit by a group of Egyptian intellectuals to Jerusalem to launch the Copenhagen peace alliance was overshadowed by last Friday's bomb blast in Tel Aviv. **Nevine Khalil** reports

A group of seven Egyptian intellectuals paid an unprecedented visit to Jerusalem last weekend to join Palestinian and Israeli activists in launching the International Alliance for Arab-Israeli Peace, a group created in Copenhagen at the end of January. But the limelight was stolen by Friday's Tel Aviv bomb blast, which killed four people and wounded 48 others.

A march through the streets of Jerusalem by Egyptians, Palestinians and Israelis to dramatise opposition to Israel's building of a Jewish settlement in Har Homa was cancelled, although two separate marches by Palestinians and Israelis were staged near the construction site. In addition, security measures and roadblocks deployed by Israeli forces cut off access to the Gaza Strip, where a meeting had been scheduled with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

The Egyptian group included six signatories of the Copenhagen Declaration: political analyst Lutfi El-Kholi, former Ambassador Salah Bassiouni, lawyer Ali El-Shalakani, university professors Murad Wahba and Mohamed Reda Moharram and cinematographer Ramses Marzouq. The seventh member of the group, Salah Montasser, a liberal columnist with *Al-Ahram*, did not sign the Declaration.

In coordination with Israel's Peace Now Movement, the group took part in a number of meetings with peace activists in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and with Israel's Council of Foreign Relations. Members also had an unscheduled meeting with former Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

Palestinian and Israeli activists staged marches on two separate hills near Har Homa. They were unable to protest on the site itself because it had been cordoned off by the Israelis. The Egyptians were finally able to catch up with the Israeli demonstration "after a long and polite delay by Israeli forces," according to El-Kholi. "Under the pretence of protecting us, the Israeli forces delayed us for five hours before we were able to reach the Israeli group," he said.

The Egyptians later crossed to the Palestinian group of 500, led by Faisal Al-Husseini, the Palestinian Authority official in charge of Jerusalem affairs. The march was followed by a lunch and discussion hosted by the Israeli Council on Foreign Relations, of which David Kimche, the former director-general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, is a prominent member. Egypt's ambassador to Israel, Mohamed Bassiouni, also attended.

El-Kholi, Bassiouni and Montasser did most of the talking on behalf of the Alliance, criticising Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's hardline policies, especially those relating to settlement expansion, describing them as detrimental to the peace process. El-Kholi called Israel the "only colonial state at the end of the 20th century." Netanyahu, through his settlement policies, was "building tombs for peace, and not houses," he added.

Finally, just hours before their return to Cairo, the group met former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, at his request.

At the end of the visit, Peace Now and the Egyptian group issued a joint statement condemning the construction of Jewish housing in East Jerusalem which, it said, is "against the letter and spirit of the Oslo Accords, breeds mistrust and jeopardises negotiations on final status."

"The Egyptian group went to join hands with the Palestinians and Peace Now members in their protest [and] condemnation of the decision of the Israeli government to build on Har Homa," the statement said.

The joint statement condemned the suicide bombings targeting civilians, because "violence leads to more obstacles and provides the fanatic forces on both sides of the conflict with ammunition to stall the peace process." But while demanding that these acts must end, the statement also reminded the Israeli government that "provocation and frustration are a major cause of such violence."

The statement also called for the release of all Palestinian detainees and said that no solution could be reached without the recognition of "the legitimate, national right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent state, alongside Israel, on the territories occupied [after] 5 June 1967." It also called on Israel to withdraw from Syria's Golan Heights and implement the UN Security Council's Resolution 425 on withdrawal from the occupied zone in southern Lebanon.

After "broad and deep" discussions between the Egyptians and Peace Now, both sides agreed that the implementation of agreements signed between the Israelis and Palestinians "in all their details and [according to the agreed] timetable must be respected and executed forthwith," the statement said. The two sides had also agreed that governments are bound by the commitments of their predecessors, "consequently negotiations between Israel and Syria should be resumed from the point reached with the Rabin-Peres government."

The statement concluded that "the forces of peace must join hands to strengthen their cooperation through a better understanding between the peoples on both sides of the conflict."

Private airline ready for take-off

Anticipating difficulties, but encouraged by the government's privatisation policy, a new private airline is preparing for take-off, writes **Rehab Saad**

A group of travel agents have decided to establish a private airline with an initial capital estimated at LE500 million. The 20 founders met this week to decide the legal form of the new company, called Cairo Air, which is expected to begin operations in June.

However, bearing in mind the failure of the ZAS airline, the founders expressed apprehension that the project might be confronted with insurmountable difficulties, and appealed to the government to end what they described as an EgyptAir monopoly over civil aviation in this country.

Founded in 1982 as a cargo transport company, ZAS expanded its operations five years later, organising charter flights. But it went out of business in 1995 as a result of financial difficulties caused by the Gulf War and the consequent slump in tourism.

"We discussed every single detail of the new company at our meeting and our discussions were successful," said Ahmed Zaki, one of the founders and the head of the Travel Chambers Federation. Recalling the failure of similar projects, he said he was, nevertheless, encouraged by the government's privatisation policy.

"Similar attempts made by others ended in failure for reasons beyond their control," Zaki said. One of those reasons was the "monopoly held by some people over civil aviation in Egypt and their refusal to allow others to compete with them."

But since the government is now privatisation-oriented, the Civil Aviation Authority should grant permits to "serious private companies and make it possible for them to operate," Zaki argued.

Another founder, Nabil Abdel-Latif, said: "We will not allow any company to monopolise civil aviation in this country. For this reason, we appeal to the government, before our company starts operating, to change the law which grants EgyptAir all the privileges. The new law should bar EgyptAir from making life difficult for the other companies and should allow competition that is based on sound planning and experience."

Most businessmen interviewed by *Al-Ahram Weekly* believe that the future of private airlines hangs in the air. "If the present conditions continue, I assure you that bankruptcy will be the destiny of any private airline," predicted Ali Abdel-Moneim, owner of Alim Airlines, a private charter company which froze its activities in Egypt and is now hiring its planes to foreign companies.

According to Abdel-Moneim, the biggest problem facing private airlines is that they are charged exorbitant fees for ground services — ramps for descending from the aircraft, shuttle buses and plane-cleaning services. These services, he added, are under the control of EgyptAir and the Egyptian Aviation Service, a private company in which EgyptAir is a major shareholder. "I used to pay $3,000 for the ground services for every trip, although they should cost no more than $100. So, if I operated 25 trips a month, I would end up paying $75,000."

Moreover, he continued, there were always delays in getting the ramps and shuttle buses to his planes "which hindered our activity and, consequently, tarnished our reputation." As foreign airlines are allowed to handle their own ground services, the same right should be granted to private Egyptian airlines, Abdel-Moneim argued.

Nagwa El-Mehi of Raslan Air, a private air taxi company, agreed that the cost of the ground services was the most serious problem facing private airlines. "We do not have problems concerning delays or clashes with EgyptAir, but the fuel and ground services cost us a lot of money," she said.

Ali Rashad of Heliopolis Airlines, a private charter company which has made about 190 trips to and from Europe since it began operating last August, said his company has its own ramps and so only uses the shuttle buses. "To my surprise, I was charged the full fees for servicing the plane, although I had requested only one service," he said. "But if you ask for one thing or 10, you are still charged the full amount." Rashad suggested that private airlines should either be allowed to service themselves or be charged only for the service they request.

Ali of Alim Airlines said EgyptAir not only holds a monopoly on ground services, but also on the majority of aviation routes connecting Egypt with the rest of the world. "I cannot get a group from the capital of any country to Cairo if that capital is served by EgyptAir," he said. "If I insist on bringing them from their capital, I have to land in Hurghada or Luxor, for example, first and from there fly to Cairo. This costs us additional fuel, plus $3,000 for ground services."

Rashad of Heliopolis Airlines believes there should be cooperation, rather than competition, between EgyptAir and the private airlines, especially in peak seasons. "All over the world, there is cooperation between national and private airlines," he argued. He cited France as an example. EgyptAir makes 10 flights to Paris every week whereas Air France makes seven trips to Cairo, leaving the remaining three to CorsAir, a private company. "This sort of cooperation does not threaten Air France in any way and it should be done in Egypt as well," he said.

Abdel-Moneim sounded confident about the future. "I believe that the private airlines will be given freedom sooner or later because the country's policy is now directed towards the private sector. Egypt is now encouraging the establishment of private airports, and from my viewpoint, this is a step towards giving greater freedom to private airlines."

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

More than five years ago, a conference in Madrid launched the current peace process. Netanyahu's bulldozers in Jebel Abu Ghneim may prove to have been its demise. Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims rose up in fury and, in mass protests in the West Bank, student demonstrations in Cairo, and even in a meeting of top officials of the Islamic countries in Islamabad, calls for an end to all ties with Israel echoed resoundly

Where there's a will there's a way

Rasha Saad talks to leading Hamas figure Mahmoud Al-Zahar about the future of the peace process and his group

Following the suicide attack in a Tel Aviv café last Friday, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu accused Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat of opening the door to violence by easing the pressure on radical Islamic groups like the Movement for Islamic Resistance (Hamas).

On Sunday, Netanyahu laid down his conditions for resuming the peace talks with the Palestinians. "I am putting the first condition for peace on the table. I want them to start fighting terrorism," the Israeli prime minister said in a televised interview with CNN.

But the next day, Mohamed Dahlan, head of preventive security in the Palestinian-controlled Gaza Strip, said, "We reject the new Israeli conditions and will not discuss them," adding, "We are not waiting for orders from Israel." And on Tuesday, Arafat, at the end of a brief visit to Sri Lanka, reiterated what Dahlan said, rejecting Israeli calls to clamp down on Hamas.

However, earlier reports indicated growing tension between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas. Al-Ahram Weekly *talked to a leading figure of Hamas in Gaza, Mahmoud Al-Zahar, about the relationship between Hamas and the PA and the collapsing Middle East peace process.*

How would you describe the relationship between the PA and Hamas at present?
Our last meeting with the PA took place a month ago in Nablus. That was before the events which led to this month's troubles. Then, we had a unified stance vis-à-vis Israel. After all that has taken place this month, we urgently need to meet again. The issue of Jerusalem has priority over any other. Jerusalem is everybody's concern, and we must stand united. Not only is another national Palestinian meeting needed, but we must have concerted action by all Arab countries, especially those countries which have always supported Palestinian rights such as Egypt.

Are you not afraid that the latest suicide attack in Tel Aviv will intensify efforts to clamp down on Hamas?
Hamas is a strong organisation which has been able in the past to stand up to various attacks, both internal and external. Hamas merely reflects the feelings of Palestinians and Arabs and then translates those feelings into action. It is not in the interest of any Arab party to clamp down on Hamas.

Do you feel that Hamas enjoys more popular support now that the peace process is on the brink of collapse?
By standing against Israeli occupation, Hamas does not seek to satisfy people as much as it seeks to satisfy God. Some people will agree with the path we take, while others will disagree. However, most people in the Occupied Territories now feel that Hamas has been right, especially after the latest Israeli acts. Some people used to believe that Israel seeks peace and that Hamas is the obstacle to it. They are now convinced that this is not the case.

Your organisation has called for a 'holy Jihad' as the only solution. Does this mean that you are are calling for a halt to the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations?
I believe that all options should be left open. We have a government that believes that negotiations will be fruitful. Others believe that the Intifada must be revived. The 1987-1992 Intifada was not a Palestinian choice. The Palestinians were driven to the uprising because of Israeli action. Now, again, we are being driven to the conclusion that the Intifada is the only way to regain our rights. The recent wave of violence was instigated primarily by Israel. The Palestinian reaction is merely legitimate resistance to the illegitimate usurping of Palestinian land by Israel. If Israel continues to murder Palestinians and their dreams and aspirations, it should not blame anybody but itself for the continued violence.

Is there anything that Israel can do to win the trust of the Palestinians at this stage?
Whatever Israel offers now will not convince us that it is genuinely interested in peace. There will always be a lack of trust.

Why, in your opinion, did Israel decide to begin the construction of the Har Homa settlement now?
From the beginning Netanyahu and his Likud Party were not enthusiastic about the peace process. However, there are many indications that the Israeli people themselves — Likud or not — are not genuinely interested in peace. When [former Prime Minister] Rabin reneged on negotiating with Syria, and when he delayed withdrawal from the West Bank, he was responding to the sentiments of the Israeli man in the street. Peres lost elections when he represented and supported peace, so we cannot only blame the Likud for being against peace.

How do you view the latest developments between Israel and the Palestinians? Do they mean the end of the Oslo agreements?
We have always opposed both the Madrid process and the Oslo Accords. Israel went to Oslo in search of its national security, rather than genuine peace. It concentrated on its security demands and it got what it wanted. Even after the Palestinians agreed on the Oslo terms, Rabin halted negotiations on the Syrian track and spoke about redeployment [from the West Bank] rather than withdrawal. There was the problem of Hebron which Peres refused to solve, leaving it to Likud.

Now Israel seeks to murder the peace process after it succeeded in guaranteeing its security. However, the most important thing about the latest suicide bombing in Tel Aviv is the message it conveys to Netanyahu: there will be no security as long as you continue to disregard the Palestinians.

How do you perceive the future of Jerusalem?
We still hope to recover Jerusalem. We are proud of the Egyptians who staged a march in support of Jerusalem last Friday, and of the Jordanians who also back the issue along with all Arabs. However, we are waiting for these feelings to be translated into more positive action.
Before the emergence of Hamas, these Arab countries played a great role in supporting the Palestinians, and their youth used to come to the Occupied Territories to join in the resistance against the Israelis. We are not imposing anything on them, but we trust that there will be action.

Are you calling for an Arab summit?
I do not mean that a summit is necessarily the answer. We have to differentiate between the will and the means. As long as the Arabs have a strong will to support the Palestinians then the means to achieve this will not be a problem.

Palestinians unite in anger

Palestinian protests, Arafat hopes, will expedite international intervention in the peace process, writes **Graham Usher** from Jerusalem

Last week, the PLO's most senior official in Jerusalem, Faisal Al-Husseini, warned the Israeli government that its settlement policies would spark an "explosion which neither I nor any other Palestinian leader will be able to control". Over the next six days, the explosions came — in the form of mass Palestinian protests in the West Bank cities of Bethlehem and Hebron and, more ominously, in the return of Palestinian suicide operations against civilians inside Israel.

On 21 March, a bomb ripped apart a restaurant in central Tel Aviv, leaving three Israelis dead and 61 injured. The bomber, also killed in the blast, was Mahmoud Runimat, a 28-year-old Palestinian from Tsurif, a village near Hebron under Israel's military control. Villagers say Runimat was a Hamas supporter, but "not active".

The only other line of responsibility for the bombing came in a statement released on 22 March by the "Izzeddin El-Qassam brigades, Hamas military wing, Jerusalem". It warned of further attacks should Israel continue to build the Har Homa settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim. The Hamas leadership in the West Bank and Gaza has either kept silent about the bombing or denied any involvement. The 22 March statement says Izzeddin El-Qassem "enjoys an independent, organised military structure outside the [Palestinian] self-rule areas".

Israeli leader Binyamin Netanyahu was not blaming Hamas. It was rather the Palestinian Authority (PA) which, he alleged, had given Hamas the "green light" to resume military operations against Israeli targets. The charge was repeated on 23 March in statements by Israel's head of military intelligence, Moshe Ya'alon, and the Israeli army chief of staff, Amnon Shahak.

The bases for the accusations are two events which preceded the Tel Aviv operation. Following the Palestinian National Dialogue conference in Nablus on 27 February, the PA released around 150 Hamas activists from its prisons, including Ibrahim Makadmeh, arrested a year ago as the leader of a Hamas cell dedicated to attacking both Israel and the PA. At a rally in Gaza on 21 March, Makadmeh told a 10,000-strong crowd that "the bulldozers of the enemy" will not be stopped by "our unarmed people, but only through the holy warriors carrying explosives on their shoulders". On news of the speech — which occurred before the Tel Aviv blast — the PA issued an order for Makadmeh's arrest for "incitement against the Palestinian Authority". But, say Hamas sources, Makadmeh has yet to be arrested.

The other event was a meeting on 9 March between the PA and Hamas' political leadership in Gaza. Israeli security officials say while Arafat did not give a direct order for armed attacks, his "style" and "body language" at the meeting conveyed a signal to Hamas that he would not be averse to them. It is a charge rigorously denied by the PA's West Bank Head of Preventive Security (PS), Jibril Rajoub.

"I participated in the meeting with Hamas and opposition organisations, and there was almost universal agreement that attacks harm the interest of the PA, and do not help in the attainment of the political goal," Rajoub said. As for the Tel Aviv operation, he said, "Nobody knows who planned and organised it. Not every Hamas member is controlled by the Hamas moderate leadership."

What is clear is that the PA's responses to the 21 March attack have been markedly different from those which followed the suicide operations last year, when over 1,000 Palestinians were detained in the self-rule areas in a ruthless PA crackdown. So far, there have been no reported arrests of Hamas activists in the West Bank. In Gaza, "while some Hamas people have been summoned by the PA for questioning, none have been arrested," said Hamas leader Said Abu Musameh.

Palestinian sources say Arafat's restraint is less to do with any "green light" given by the PA. It has much to do with the mood of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza.

For the last six days, confrontations between Palestinian youths and the Israeli army have broken out in Hebron, Bethlehem and numerous Palestinian villages. The clashes have been marked by their nationalist character, with both Fatah and Hamas activists at the fore. The mood was encapsulated at an emergency meeting of Fatah's Higher Committee in Beit Sahour on 23 March. There, Fatah not only supported the Hebron and Bethlehem protests. It called on Palestinians to escalate demonstrations in the Occupied Territories, Israel and the region under the slogans of "Jerusalem — the capital of Palestine" and "no peace with settlements".

Fatah also called on the PA to end all cooperation with Israel's security forces, a message that appears to have had an effect. At a press conference on 24 March, PS head in Gaza Mohamed Dahlan — who, like Rajoub, is also a member of Fatah — announced that while in the past the PA had "carried out arrests of Hamas leaders and responded to each request made by Israel in the security sphere", today "we will not accept Israeli demands that persons be arrested in the autonomous areas".

In such a climate, any crackdown by Arafat on Hamas would not only risk inter-Palestinian conflict but real splits within Fatah. Should there be any repetition of the mass arrests against Hamas suspects, says Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti, "Fatah would not simply oppose the PA. It would organise demonstrations against the PA".

But there is also a sense that Arafat wants a degree of controlled disorder in the West Bank. While condemning the Tel Aviv bombing as "terrorism" during his trip to Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the PLO leader lost no chance to blame Israel for the violence in the West Bank, especially its settlement policies in Jerusalem. In the Hebron and Bethlehem protests, the role of the PA police has been less one of repression than of keeping the clashes at the level of stones and Molotov cocktails instead of guns and bombs. Nor has there been any attempt to stop the protests altogether. Arafat's aim with the protests, say Palestinian sources, is to expedite international intervention in the peace process. It appears to be working.

On 26 March, the US State Department announced that it was sending its special envoy, Dennis Ross, to Israel and Gaza to prepare an emergency meeting between Netanyahu and Arafat. The US will demand that Arafat curb "violence" in Israel and the West Bank. Arafat's condition hitherto for any summit with Netanyahu is that Israel stop all settlement activity in the Occupied Territories and "renegotiate" its first further redeployment offer. If both conditions are to be met, US pressure will need to be exerted not only on Arafat but also, critically, on Netanyahu.

America's balancing act

With the Middle East peace process on the verge of collapse, the US is treading carefully as it tries to restore negotiations. **Lamis Andoni** reports from Washington

Alarmed by the recent flare up of violence between the Israelis and the Palestinians, Washington is trying to get Binyamin Netanyahu and Yasser Arafat back to the negotiating table to avert a collapse of the peace process.

However, what Washington is not willing to do, according to American officials, is allow the Palestinians to use international sympathy to reassert the Arab identity of East Jerusalem. From the American viewpoint, the Palestinians were seeking to prejudge the final status of Jerusalem by lobbying for a United Nations Security Council resolution calling on Israel to stop the housing buildings in Abu Ghneim on the south-eastern edge of the city.

In the words of a government official, "The draft Security Council resolution is as bad as the Israeli unilateral decision on build housing units in Abu Ghneim." He argued that the wording of the two resolutions, which the US vetoed at the United Nations, prejudged the final status of East Jerusalem by referring to it as "part of the Occupied Territories".

"We shall never allow a resolution that refers to East Jerusalem as part of the Occupied Territories to pass", the official, who asked to remain anonymous, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

When asked if this meant that the US did not actually consider East Jerusalem to be an occupied territory he said that the government is committed to the Oslo agreements which left the final status of Jerusalem to be determined at the conclusive stage of the negotiating process.

The American understanding of the Oslo Accords seems to be identical to that of Israel. Both countries maintain that what is applicable to the rest of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is not applicable to East Jerusalem, the settlements and the border areas whereon decisions were deferred until the final status negotiations. It also means that Washington sees Jerusalem as a disputed land as opposed to an occupied land, thus, according equal claim — at best — to the two parties involved.

Washington's interpretation effectively deepens concern in the Arab world that the US is steadily working to undermine all of the United Nations Security Council resolutions that affirmed Palestinian national rights in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, including East Jerusalem.

The American ambassador to the United Nations justified the two American vetoes by arguing that the dispute over Abu Ghneim should be solved in bilateral negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

The US does oppose the construction of housing units in Abu Ghneim, not because it recognises the Arab identity of East Jerusalem but because it believes that these issues should be left to a later stage. Consequently, even if this serious crisis is overcome, the Palestinians will not find American support once they put their claim to Jerusalem on the negotiating table.

In fact, the American position is part of the reason that the Palestinian Authority (PA) has not been willing to heed Israeli demands that it crack down on Palestinian Islamists in the aftermath of the Tel Aviv suicide bombing. "The battle over Jerusalem has begun," a PLO official in Gaza said.

But this is precisely what the US, according to well-informed analysts in Washington, is trying to avert. The analysts believe that Washington will do its best to prevent the crisis over Abu Ghneim from turning, as it is already, into a catalyst for an international, Arab and Muslim campaign for Palestinian rights in East Jerusalem.

Firstly, Washington, according to government sources, believes that such a development would jeopardise the peace process since Israel would feel "alienated". Secondly, such a campaign could disrupt the dynamics of the current peace process which had moved away from international forums and resolutions to bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on the basis of the Oslo Accords.

Therefore, the State Department has been engaged in constant contact with both sides in a desperate attempt to get the leaders back to the negotiating table, prevent all out confrontation and to seek a compromise.

According to the same sources, Washington has tried to talk Israel into finding a way to freeze its decision to build — but to no avail.

The alternative is to secure some small steps — including getting Israel to authorise the opening of sea and airports in Gaza and to facilitate Palestinian officials' movements in and out of East Jerusalem — which might restore Palestinian hopes in the peace process.

What Washington has achieved so far is getting Israel to put off the closing of Palestinian offices that were believed to be affiliated with the Palestinian Authority in East Jerusalem.

Another option being discussed, according to well-informed sources, is to persuade Israel to increase the scope of land it will transfer to Palestinian jurisdiction in the first phase of further Israeli troops redeployment.

Palestinians have already rejected the nine per cent that Israel offered to transfer initially. They objected to the fact that the real transfer would only cover two per cent of the area C — which is under total Israel control — and to the Israeli decision to unilaterally determine the scope of its troops' withdrawals.

But Washington will not press Israel to negotiate the scope of its withdrawals, a right that the former secretary of state, Warren Christopher, guaranteed in his letter of assurances to Israel following the signing of the Hebron Protocols in January.

And for the US to get any Israeli agreement to take steps to improve ties with the Palestinians, the Palestinians will have to deliver on Israeli security demands, as most recent American statements indicate.

Initially, American officials dismissed Israeli suggestions that Arafat has given the green light to Hamas to carry out violent acts against Israel. But this week they shifted their position and urged the Palestinians to give an unequivocal "red light" to the "Palestinian militants".

In the past, US and Israeli pressure prompted Arafat to round up hundred of Islamist and leftists. Arafat only started releasing Palestinian opposition members recently as part of an effort to open a Palestinian national dialogue. Furthermore, he was also under pressure from international human rights organisation to release political detainees.

Pro-Israeli groups, senators and congress members, apparently influenced by Netenyahu's media campaign, have also started putting pressure on the State Department to urge Arafat to crack down on the Palestinian Islamists.

Human rights organisations, including Amnesty International and Middle East Watch, have repeatedly blamed Washington and Israel for encouraging Palestinian security forces to take steps that are in blatant violation of human rights conventions. In his remarks on Monday, White House press secretary Mike McCurry, sought to exonerate Washington from such responsibility by urging Arafat to tighten his grip on Hamas but without resorting to "extra-constitutional" measures.

But if in the past Arafat was ready to commit human rights violations to save the peace process, the main priority now is to save East Jerusalem and for that he needs the support of his people, Palestinian officials in Gaza say.

Lebanon urges end to normalisation

Lebanon called for a halt to Arab economic normalisation with Israel **Zeina Khodr** reports from Beirut

Lebanon has added its voice in condemning Israel's decision to build a new Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem. In fact, it went even further and called for a halt to the process of normalising relations with Israel during a special summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Islamabad over the weekend. Lebanese leaders, resistance officials and Palestinian factions in the country warned that Israel's policies were killing the Middle East peace process and that the heightened tension between the Arabs and Israel bodes ill for the region and south Lebanon.

"A major confrontation in the region cannot be ruled out," Lebanon's Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri said. "Israel is responsible for the deterioration, due to [Prime Minister Binyamin] Netanyahu's intransigence and indifference towards Arab rights and feelings. The war mentality which prevails in the Israeli government is pushing the region into a cycle of instability."

Hariri called on Islamic states to stop the process of normalising ties with Israel, particularly on the economic level, saying that the continuation of normalisation has encouraged Netanyahu to ignore international criticism and maintain his hardline stances that have plunged the region into a new cycle of violence.

Foreign Minister Fares Boueiz, who will be representing Lebanon at the OIC Jerusalem Committee meeting due to open in Rabat, Morocco, today, did not rule out an escalation in military operations in south Lebanon as a result of the heightened tension in the region. "The building of settlements runs contrary to the peace process and negates all the efforts put into its advancement," he said.

"In light of the deadlock in the peace process, the possibility of war has increased," Hajj Mohamed Kamati, the deputy head of Hizbullah's political bureau told. *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "We do not believe Israel will attempt to occupy more land in the south. This would be too costly for the Israeli army. But this doesn't mean we can't expect a wide-scale attack similar to Israel's July 1993 and April 1996 offensives against Lebanon."

Kamati explained that Israel has not been respecting the terms of the April ceasefire understanding. "Israel wants to stop resistance attacks against its soldiers in occupied south Lebanon. It cannot retaliate in the way it wants to, since it would have to answer to the monitoring group. This is why it wants to change the truce. The only way is by escalating the situation in south Lebanon and possibly launching a large-scale assault."

The understanding bans attacks into and from civilian areas on both sides of the border, but it sanctions resistance military operations against Israeli occupying soldiers. A five-nation ceasefire monitoring group was established to observe the truce and look into violations. Hizbullah, the group spearheading the resistance war to oust Israeli soldiers from south Lebanon, has vehemently denounced the settlement building in Jerusalem. "Netanyahu's plan to control all Palestinian land and to complete the building of a larger Jerusalem will continue, especially since America has given him support," the group said in a statement. "Netanyahu continues to humiliate and suppress the Arabs because of [Palestinian President Yasser] Arafat's treachery. The only hope is if the Arabs close ranks and assist the resistance, and the Intifada grows. We also need to combine our efforts in order to reinforce Syria's resistance against mounting pressure."

A Hizbullah deputy, Mohamed Raad, praised last week's Tel Aviv bombing. "It showed Palestinian frustration with Israeli attempts to Judaise Jerusalem," he said.

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon also condemned the settlement building in Jerusalem. Refugees in the 12 camps scattered across the country observed a general strike last Saturday. At the entrances of some camps, Palestinians lit fires and carried Palestinian flags. The strike call was made by Palestinian factions including supporters of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

"The strike aimed at showing our sympathy and solidarity with our people in the Occupied Territories," Ghazi Al-Asidi, member of the popular committee at the Ain Al-Helweh camp in Sidon, told the *Weekly*. "This is a message to [US President] Clinton, Netanyahu and the whole world. They should not make the mistake of thinking we are weak. The power inside the hearts of millions of Palestinians everywhere will not allow their policy and projects against our people to succeed. We will continue the struggle and the uprising inside occupied Palestine until we achieve a just peace and all Palestinians return to our homeland. We announce our commitment to Jerusalem as an eternal capital for an independent Palestinian state."

Asked how he believed Israel's policies would affect southern Lebanon, Asidi said that if the uprising continues inside Palestine it would affect the whole region, and south Lebanon would not be exempted.

Netanyahu's policies are not only raising the spectre of more violence but are also ruling out an early resumption of peace talks.

"Netanyahu is not interested in peace. Since his accession to power last May, the peace process has stopped on the Syrian and Lebanese fronts and progress has been slow on the Palestinian track." Hizbullah's Kamati said.

Despite the flurry of diplomatic activity by European envoys, the secretary-general of Hizbullah, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, did not expect a breakthrough. It was, he said, the US that really counted: "We have to take into consideration what Washington is doing because the Israelis are committed only to the Americans, just as the Americans are committed to Israel, and they insist on monopolising the peace-making effort."

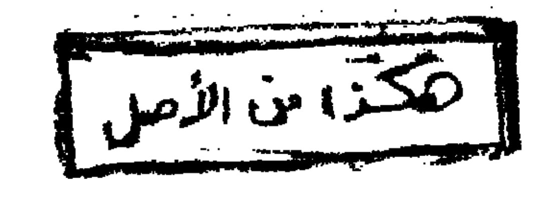
Foreign Minister Boueiz has called on the US to resume its role as an unbiased peace broker since its recent stances have shot its credibility as an honest mediator.

And the prime minister did not believe that Europe could forge peace alone. "Increased European activity in the region is not a substitute for American sponsorship of the faltering peace process," Hariri said. "The Europeans themselves say their role is complementary to that of the US. They, particularly France, are seeking to create an atmosphere that could be conducive to the resumption of negotiations from the point at which they stopped." Lebanon has reaffirmed its commitment to a comprehensive Middle East peace settlement but this is contingent on a commitment by Israel to drop its expansionist policies and agree to the land-for-peace formula as the basis of future negotiations.

As long as the status quo continues — the lack of trust between the parties, the absence of peace negotiations and the unrest in the Occupied Territories — violence in south Lebanon is bound to recur.

Observers and officials here stress the necessity of Arab unity and coordination during this sensitive period. They believe the Arab states are moving towards a serious commitment to last year's Cairo summit agreement which made an implicit threat to suspend the normalisation of relations with Israel.

This, they say, may be the only weapon they can use to pressure Israel to respect existing accords and international resolutions.





Palestinians throwing stones towards Israeli soldiers during rioting in Hebron last Monday *(photo: Reuters)*

Jerusalem Dominates OIC Summit

The issue of Jerusalem topped the agenda of last week's meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in Pakistan. **Ibrahim El-Bahei** reports from Islamabad

Delegates from 53 Islamic countries participated in the meetings of the special summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) held in the Pakistani capital Islamabad. Afghanistan, due to internal unrest, was the only Islamic country absent from the meetings, which took place from 21 - 24 March.

The special OIC summit was held to celebrate Pakistan's independence in 1947, but Jerusalem was by far its most urgent issue. The final communiqué voiced support to the Palestinian position concerning Jerusalem and called on the United Nations to compel Israel to stop work on a new settlement in East Jerusalem.

The communiqué, entitled "Islamabad Declaration," also urges Islamic countries to act in solidarity in preparation for the coming century.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and other Arab leaders attacked the Jewish state for its expansionist policies and lambasted the United States for failing to condemn Israel at UN sessions.

OIC Secretary-General Ezzeddine Laraki appealed to the international community to halt Israel's "practices aimed at Judaising the whole city (of Jerusalem) and emptying it of its Palestinians."

During the OIC meetings, delegates called on Islamic countries to cooperate more on security matters and resolve their differences in order to play a more vigorous role during the next century.

In his speech, Arafat asked the OIC to rally behind the Palestinians, demanding the establishment of an OIC working group to follow up the issue of Jerusalem.

Arafat attributed the deterioration in the peace process to what he called "Israeli arrogance."

The Palestinian leader said that Israel hopes, through its establishment of new settlements, to cut off Jerusalem from the West Bank. He added that Israel is bowing to "extremist religious parties, which, we know, are hostile to the peace process and to the rights of the Palestinian people."

Arafat, who left Islamabad for a tour of Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, is due to attend a meeting of the OIC's Al-Quds (Jerusalem) Committee to be held in Morocco on 27-28 March.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, speaking on behalf of President Hosni Mubarak, also voiced the need for Islamic countries to take a firm stand against Israel's policy of building settlements. Moussa said that Israel is acting in disregard of international agreements and conventions that it signed. The developments in Jerusalem should not pass by without a firm stance, the Egyptian minister said.

For his part, Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani viewed the outcome of the summit as less than satisfactory. In a press conference, he said that the resolutions adopted in the final communiqué were "deficient."

Rafsanjani said that Iran views the Jerusalem issue as the most crucial challenge facing the Muslim world and as one that the summit should have addressed more vigorously.

The Iranian president said that when he saw President Clinton sitting on a chair with a broken leg, giving his orders to use the US veto for the second time against a resolution denouncing Israeli measures in Jerusalem, this reminded him of late Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Dayan, looking on with one eye and giving orders to Israelis to fire on Palestinians.

Venting his frustration on Israeli policies, Rafsanjani said that Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu deserves a place right at the top of the world's most notorious terrorists due to his policies in the Occupied Territories

Encircling Israel

President Hosni Mubarak has urged the Islamic world to confront Israel's continued occupation of Jerusalem and its attempts to alter the demographic character of the holy city. In a speech to the Islamabad Islamic summit, delivered on his behalf by Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, Mubarak warned that Israel's policies would finish off an already ailing peace process.

"The grave circumstances of the current situation in Jerusalem are being compounded by Israel's continued occupation and its attempt to change the city's character," Mubarak said in Sunday's speech. "This is a major challenge which the Islamic world should confront firmly and strongly."

Israel's policy of "establishing settlements, usurping territory and ignoring the concluded agreements is bound to finish off the peace process, which is already crumbling," he stated, adding that Israel was frittering away the strenuous efforts that had been made to achieve a just peace and set the terms for coexistence among the peoples of the region.

Mubarak said the Organisation of the Islamic Conference should adopt resolutions "which would constitute the weapon *of Islamic diplomacy in its battle* for Jerusalem."

He also declared support for an assertion by Yasser Arafat — made before the summit — about the necessity of "encircling Israel's policy, which violates law and logic."

Steps should be taken on the issue of Jerusalem "to lend credibility and effectiveness to Islamic states, and to this conference, so that the policy-makers in Israel may not assume that Jerusalem, justice and the law are vulnerable," *he* said. "Our duty now is to save the Middle East peace process, which is based on the principle of exchanging land for peace, and to act to save Jerusalem."





A Palestinian policeman carries a wounded boy during clashes between Palestinian students and Israeli soldiers in Bethlehem *(photos: AFP)*



Yasser Arafat and Amr Moussa during the summit of the OIC

Outrage in Egypt

Egyptian public opinion has erupted in fury over Israel's actions in Jerusalem. **Nevine Khalil** reports

Opposition parties, government officials, religious dignitaries, the People's Assembly, women activists and the man in the street were unanimous this week in condemning Israel's decision to build a Jewish quarter in Arab East Jerusalem. Officials warned that the Israeli action could lead to an eruption of violence in the region, opposition parties called for an emergency Arab *summit and university students* gave vent to their anger by staging mass demonstrations and burning the Israeli and American flags.

Dozens of women staged an anti-Israel protest outside the Arab League headquarters in downtown Cairo yesterday. The women, including veteran actresses, writers and opposition party members, called for a break in ties with Israel and the "burning" of the Israeli mission in Cairo. Eight delegates met with the league's secretary-general, Esmat Abdel-Meguid, to urge the league "to assume its responsibilities to convene an Arab summit as soon as possible to confront Israeli arrogance and American intransigence on Jerusalem."

Thousands of students from four universities called for an Arab-wide struggle against Israel to halt its expansionist policies in Jerusalem and other occupied territories. As on-campus protests continued, some 5,000 students at Cairo University called for the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador from Cairo and breaking off all ties with Israel.

"Bullets are the only response to settlement building," students shouted on Tuesday, holding aloft a model of Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third holiest *shrine. About 1,000* students left the campus and took to the streets but they were quickly shepherded back by riot police.

On Monday, thousands demonstrated at Ain Shams University, chanting anti-Israeli and anti-American slogans and setting fire to Israeli and US flags. Smaller protests took place at Al-Azhar and Helwan universities. Riot police watched from outside the university compounds *but did not intervene* because students made no attempt to leave the campuses.

Opposition parties from across the political spectrum also demanded the severance of ties with Israel and called for an emergency Arab summit to forge a united anti-Israel front.

The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, praised the student protests and urged the Arabs to "defend their honour" as they had done in past wars against Israel. "We must be ready to defend our religion and our shrines," Tantawi said on Monday. "Wars between ourselves and Israel go back 50 years."

During last Friday's prayers at Al-Azhar Mosque, broadcast live by radio and television, millions of Egyptians listened to Tantawi urging Arabs and Muslims to "stand by our *Palestinian brethren in their* fight against the injustice which has befallen them and to defend holy Jerusalem."

Tantawi, who heads Egypt's most prestigious Islamic institution, said: "We are *willing* to sacrifice our lives and all our possessions because we will never accept this oppression."

During a provincial visit the following day, Tantawi said the Israeli government "is working for war and civil strife, and not for a just and comprehensive peace." Tantawi also affirmed his refusal to visit Al-Aqsa Mosque until sovereignty over East Jerusalem reverts to the Palestinians.

At the Friday prayers, worshippers shouted Islamic slogans as guest speakers, including Minister of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments) Hamdi Zaqzouq, expressed solidarity with the Palestinians and condemned Israel's expansionist policy. Zaqzouq said that on crucial issues all political parties stand as one with the government. *Jerusalem, he said, represented "the honour* and virtue of the whole Islamic nation" and must be defended.

Many party leaders took part in the prayers, including Labour's Ibrahim Shukri, Tagammu's Khaled Mohieddin, the Liberal Party's Mustafa Kamel Murad and the Nasserists' Diaeddin Dawoud.

In a statement issued on Saturday, opposition parties, along with the communists and the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, called for an Arab summit conference to "breathe life into the resolutions of [last June's] Cairo Arab summit and draw up some practical steps for their implementation, including the revival of the collective Arab defence pact."

The political groups also called for a joint Arab declaration "rejecting any form of relationship between the Arab governments and peoples and Israel," and urged *support for the Palestinian resistance to the Israeli* occupation.

The statement, which accused Israel and the United States of "practically destroying" all attempts to reach a just and comprehensive peace in the region, urged President Hosni Mubarak to spearhead the move to confront the Israeli-US onslaught.

The statement demanded the severance of economic ties and even went as far as to call for the freezing of all agreements signed between Egypt and Israel since the 1979 peace treaty. "The Egyptian ambassador to Israel should be recalled and the Israeli ambassador in Cairo expelled," the statement said. The political groups also urged the Egyptian government to reassess its relationship with the United States if the latter continues *its "hostile" policies.*

Government statements, although less scathing, warned against the Israeli government's continuous use of force and the abuse of Palestinian rights. Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said Israel's expansionist policy and its "defiance of Arab sentiments" would have "the most dire consequences and augment Arab frustrations as well as the belief that [Prime Minister Binyamin] Netanyahu cannot be checked because he has the support of some major powers."

Moussa, speaking in Islamabad where he attended the Islamic summit, described Netanyahu's policy as "very short-sighted... This policy is responsible for what is happening. We regret the killing of civilians but it is an indication of extreme frustration. The Israeli government should reconsider its expansionist policy which could lead to a resurgence of violence in the region."

Mubarak's political adviser, Osama El-Baz, said that it was wrong to hold the Palestinian Authority responsible for the outbreak of violence, particularly last Friday's suicide bomb which killed four people and wounded 48. "The violence is a result of Israel challenging public opinion and provoking the people and making them lose confidence in the peace process," El-Baz said. He expressed regret for the violence, but greater regret for the Israeli policy which had led to it.

The People's Assembly denounced Israel's expansionist policy and urged Arab powers to confront this policy and Israel's abuse of Arab rights. Members of parliament applauded the Egyptian armed forces for "playing their national role and defending the country, *the peace process and Arab rights.*"

The Press Syndicate condemned the "Judaisation of occupied Jerusalem while the world community watches in silence." In a statement issued on Friday, journalists warned that Israel's policies will "blow up the peace process and stifle any glimmer of hope for the creation of a just and comprehensive peace in the region." The journalists said the normalisation of relations with Israel should be stopped and an emergency Arab summit should force Israel into regional economic isolation.



Women protestors outside the Arab League yesterday

Lumumba's ghost over Zaire

The Zairean masses are taking control of their destiny, writes Mohamed Khaled

With the capture of Kisangani — Zaire's third largest city and the biggest victory of their five month uprising — the rebels now control all of eastern Zaire.

Their territory covers 1,200km north to south, from Sudan to Zambia and is 500km wide, stretching to the borders of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania. And they are pushing westwards.

Laurent-Desire Kabila is the leader of the four-party coalition, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL), which has taken it upon itself to topple the regime of Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seku.

The ADFL describes itself as a Lumumbist movement — in reference to Patrice Lumumba, the country's first prime minister who led the Congo, now Zaire, to independence from Belgian rule. The ADFL's goal is a second liberation. Lumumba's mission was cut short when Mobutu came to power in 1965. Lumumba was brutally murdered at the hands of Mobutu's benchmen.

Although the Zairean capital, Kinshasa, more than 1,500km west of Kisangani remains distant, the ADFL intends to continue its drive to the capital, if the president does not meet its terms for a ceasefire.

An ADFL radio broadcast suggested that the rebels may sail down the Zaire River to attack — a voyage that takes three weeks. "We are now thinking of going up to Kinshasa," Kabila, the rebels' leader, said.

However, the last town that would secure the ADFL's power over the country is Gbadolite, Mobutu's home town. Situated 600km north-west of Kinshasa, it's a long trek now that the rainy season has started.

As the rebels rapidly advance, they are being welcomed by people everywhere and tens of thousands of teenagers and young adults have latched onto the movement, signing up to become soldiers. Ibrahim Mukiibi, the Ugandan ambassador to Cairo, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "Kabila's movement is a popular movement that relies on the support of the population and its success depends largely on how much popular support it gains."

But Mukiibi rejected the possibility of civil war: "This is a very healthy development. Soldiers are not fighting and people are welcoming the advancing ADFL," he said.

In Kinshasa, although all the conditions exist for a coup d'état and senior army officers are impatient with Mobutu's refusal to meet Kabila, a coup is unlikely. According to diplomats in Kinshasa, Western envoys have warned the generals that Zaire would lose international support if they attempted to overthrow the government, signalling the West's stance against a military coup. The ADFL itself enjoys Western support. The United States, which remained the anti-communist Mobutu ally throughout the Cold War, has since distanced itself from his corrupt regime.

According to Mukiibi, colonial officials in the past handed over power to national rulers who they believed would continue to serve the interests of the withdrawing colonial powers. "They are very good at using regimes to further their own interests, but then they just discard them and that is the case with Mobutu. We expect the second (current) liberation movement drive to sweep through the continent," Mukiibi added.

Samir Amin, the renowned Egyptian economist, who heads the Dakar-based Third World Forum, agreed with Mukiibi's argument. "Whenever a regime is on the verge of collapse, the West shifts its support to the opposition to ensure that the future regime will not see them as the major enemy."

"The coalition in Zaire consists of some elements which do not represent a serious threat to the West and they may cooperate with them in the future," added Amin.

The Western media has helped Kabila to publicise his message all over the world. The history of his resistance goes back to the 1960s when he led a Maoist guerrilla unit during the civil war that followed Zaire's independence from Belgium. Kabila's early struggle enjoyed the support of the legendary Che Guevara. He re-appeared in 1984 when his group seized the southern town of Moba for just two days. Subsequently, he travelled all over the continent until his re-emergence last October as head of the ADFL.

When the uprising began last September, it appeared to be a spontaneous revolt by Zairean ethnic Tutsis, the Banyamulenge. Many Zairians regarded the ADFL as invaders because they were backed by neighbouring Rwanda and Uganda. But as the rebellion spread it became clear that the Banyamulenge were not the issue and that the revolt was well planned and enjoyed the support of masses. It represented a coalition of political and ethnic interests against Mobutu's dictatorship. Kabila preached free-market economics and an end to corruption.

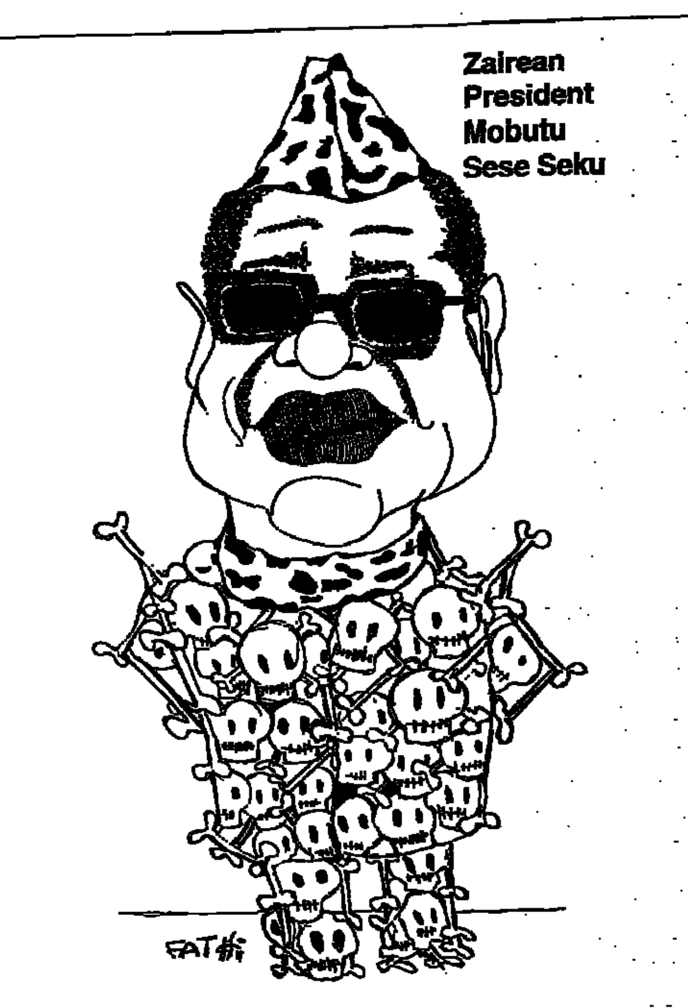
"The ADFL is a typical popular uprising against Mobutu's regime," Amin told the *Weekly*. "Some Zairean political forces have tried to convince Mobutu to impose a sort of light-intensity democracy but failed. Accordingly, the masses have no other alternative to this popular uprising. What happened in the area of the Great Lakes has created new conditions for the popular uprising."

Mukiibi agreed. "What is happening reflects the conditions in Zaire. Uganda experienced the same problems under [former Ugandan President] Idi Amin. The immediate result was the lack of social and economic development. In Uganda it took a revolution to overthrow Amin. What is happening in Zaire is very similar to what happened in Uganda 10 years ago. People have not been satisfied with the status quo in Zaire," he said.

Amin believes that the rebellion in Zaire is not a spontaneous event. "The victory in South Africa against apartheid and its ugliness ignited a new hope throughout Africa that a second wave of liberation and democracy would start. It has definitely started, what is happening in Zaire is an example.

"I do not want to be over-optimistic, but the change in Zaire may create favourable conditions for a final solution in Angola," said Amin.

However, he cautioned, "What is going on in Zaire is proof that the masses are not marginalised. They appear to be capable of making their own history. In spite of what has been repeatedly said about the hopeless case of Africa and the irredeemable crisis, the African masses are proving again their ability to carry out another wave of national liberation."



Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seku

Nkrumah's illusive dream

Gamal Nkrumah *on unforgettable memories* of Ghana's 40th independence celebrations

What place could be nicer to muse about Pan-Africanism than the Ghanaian capital Accra? Today, Ghana has one of the fastest tourism growth rates in Africa. Yet 40 years ago, the last place anyone would have thought of taking a holiday was the British West African colony of the Gold Coast.

On 6 March 1957, the Gold Coast became the independent nation of Ghana. Celebrities and political personalities from around the world flew to Accra to party. Ghana was the first African country south of the Sahara to gain independence from a European power and its independence was taken very seriously. Martin Luther King, the celebrated African American civil rights leader, attended Ghana's Independence Day celebrations in 1957. King flew in on the same American government aircraft as the then United States vice-president, Richard Nixon.

Ghana's struggle for independence was not a particularly bloody one. The Grim Reaper's heavier African harvest was restricted to Algeria and the European settler colonies of eastern and southern Africa. But Ghana's independence was uniquely symbolic. Under Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, the country was a beacon of pan-Africanist solidarity. Nkrumah gave W E B DuBois, the venerable African American pan-Africanist, sanctuary when DuBois renounced his American citizenship after being persecuted during the McCarthy years.

Nkrumah's battle cry was Africa must unite. The argument wasn't racial, it was geographical. "The independence of Ghana is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent," Nkrumah declared then. But African Americans responded to Nkrumah's vision of a strong and united Africa. The salvation of people of colour worldwide depended on the destiny of "the dark continent".

I saw this sentiment expressed firsthand when I delivered a speech on 6 March this year. I was sharing a platform with Minister Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam, one of the international celebrities who flew to Ghana for the 40th independence celebrations, at the DuBois Centre for Pan-Africanist Culture in Accra. W E B DuBois' step-son, David DuBois, shared the platform with us. King, invited as a personal guest of Nkrumah at Ghana's independence, was a very different political animal from Farrakhan. But the two men, for better or for worse, were among this century's most influential African American leaders. And so was W E B DuBois.

Accra was gripped by the excitement and razzmatazz of the 40th independence anniversary celebrations. A formidable earthquake rocked the capital on 6 March. I was in the hotel lobby. "Nkrumah is telling us that he, too, is celebrating," someone chuckled. Everyone burst out laughing.

I glanced at receptionists at the Golden Tulip Hotel, resplendent in their uniforms of the red, gold and green of the Ghanaian flag. I once knew this five-star hotel as the Inter-Continental. Today, the Golden Tulip's management is Dutch, but the hotel is owned by Libya — the majority shareholders — and the Ghanaian government.

Ivorian President Henri Konan Bedie and former Tanzanian President Mwalimu Julius Nyerere were among scores of glitterati who visited Accra on 6 March. "We might see ourselves as Ghanaians, Nigerians, Rwandans and Tanzanians but the world sees us simply as Africans," Nyerere said. He paid tribute to Nkrumah for being the pan-Africanist trendsetter and reiterated Nkrumah's warning that Africa's economic salvation lies in political unification.

Two deaths marred an otherwise upbeat 40th anniversary celebration: the death of Michael Manley, twice Jamaica's prime minister, and Cheddi Jagan, the President of Guyana. Both Manley and Jagan died on 6 March 1997.

Ghana's independence cannot be seen without its pan-African dimension. Nkrumah's Ghana was a headquarters of the pan-Africanist movement. Jagan and Manley were from the Caribbean. George Padmore, another fellow socialist West Indian, was invited by Nkrumah to set up a Pan-African centre in Accra in the 1950s. Jagan's and Manley's deaths signalled the end of an era and the point was made all the more poignant because of death's chance timing, on the day of Ghana's 40th independence celebrations.

Padmore, Jagan and Manley were long-term friends of Nkrumah and fellow socialists. Manley, like Nkrumah, won international acclaim, especially from the Non-Aligned Movement and the Socialist International, while he battled with his right-wing rival, Edward Seaga, at home.

Jagan formed the People's Progressive Party in 1950 and Nkrumah the Convention People's Party (CPP) in 1949. Jagan returned to Guyana from the US in 1943, Nkrumah returned to Ghana in 1947 after a 12-year sojourn in the US and Britain. In the first elections under adult sufferage in 1951, Nkrumah won a landslide victory. Guyana, too, experienced elections for the first time in 1953. But Jagan was only sworn in as President of Guyana in 1992, 20 years after Nkrumah's death. I passed by Padmore's old house in Accra, now a museum and library. Yet another pan-Africanist landmark.

Perhaps that is why nothing is more marketable than the name Nkrumah in Ghanaian politics. Yes, Ghana's current Rawlings regime has been accused of making political capital out of Nkrumah.

Have critics of Nkrumah had their day? Ghana is caught on a political no man's land on this one. The downsizing of the Ghanaian state has gone hand in hand with the rehabilitation of Nkrumah, toppled in a military coup d'état in 1966. Most political parties, including Rawlings' National Democratic Congress (NDC), claim to be inheritors of Nkrumah's political mantle. The First Lady, Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, head of the 31st December Movement — the country's most powerful women's organisation — complained to me bitterly about her sister's defection to the anti-Nkrumah right-wing opposition party. "My father was an ardent Nkrumaist. In the aftermath of the 1966 coup, when soldiers ransacked our house looking for incriminating material, my father hid Nkrumah's portraits and writings under his mattress," she told me when my mother and I paid her a courtesy call.

The same cannot be said for her husband. No mention was made of Nkrumah in his speech at Black Star Square in Accra on 6 March. I was told that he may have some kind of animus against Nkrumah. Yet, the papers — both official and opposition — were full of praise for Nkrumah.

An ardent Nkrumaist and veteran Ghanaian journalist, Kate Abbam, who openly speaks disparagingly about the current regime, told me, "At least with Rawlings you know where you stand. Whatever his faults, and there are many, he never claimed to be an Nkrumaist." Auntie Kate, an ethnic Nzima like Nkrumah, fretted about how Ghanaians have reverted to tribalism when Nkrumah had worked so hard to eliminate ethnic conflict in the country. Not one to mince her words, she said, "The Ewes — Rawlings own ethnic group — have positioned themselves in all the key political jobs and are enjoying many plum economic pickings." This was a complaint I heard repeated time and again during my visit to Ghana. I met many Ewes who belonged to opposition parties, however. One, Professor Mawuse Dake, joined the regime at the time of the 31 December Revolution, and is now among the Nkrumaist opposition.

Can a leopard change its spots? Auntie Kate relayed the story of how the daughter of a former senior officer [former Commissioner for Foreign Affairs Colonel Roger Felli], who was executed soon after Rawlings took power, refused to accept a medal from the president. "You killed my father," she yelled.

Can those wronged by Rawlings and his hangers-on in the early days of his rule forgive him? Rawlings himself stressed that it is high time for national reconciliation. "A wolf in sheep's clothing," opposition forces cry. But evidence of Rawling's supposed duplicity is fast wearing thin.

The opposition is appealing to the lowest common denominator: a hatred of Rawlings. Why should this be so? Can the Nkrumaist opposition forces offer a happy compromise between economic ambitions and social concerns? None of the opposition parties have outlined an economic plan that provides a viable alternative to the government's economic recovery plan (ERP).

In his Independence Day speech, Rawlings lambasted corrupt officials and unscrupulous businessmen and called for accountability. There has been enough untoward disclosures to do lasting damage to the personal reputation of several top officials and cabinet ministers. Opposition parties are having a field day and are hoping to provoke the government into retaliation. Freddie Blay, deputy speaker of the parliament, complained to me about election irregularities. Others, too, cried foul.

"If you can't beat us, join us," was a telling slogan of the ruling NDC during last December's general elections when Rawlings' party won 57 per cent of the vote. The slogan sums up the government's philosophy.

When I left Ghana in 1982, the country was in the throes of a violent revolution. Rawlings was at loggerheads with the then ruling military clique. Junior officers rebelled against their seniors. Rich against poor, hungry against well-fed. Economic development had come to a grinding halt. A debilitating brain-drain wreaked havoc. The country's institutions of higher learning, that Nkrumah set up, lay in ruins — literally. Today, Ghanaian universities have made something of a comeback. One, in Ghana's second largest city, Kumasi, changed its name back to the original Kwame Nkrumah University on 6 March.

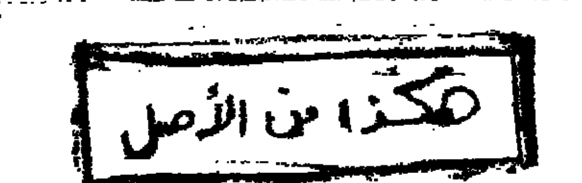
When I left the country, Ghana was a land where few dared speak their minds in public. Those who did met a dreadful end. Those few who escaped alive were hunted down. Today, things are different. The Ghanaian president and the first lady are not beyond reproach and criticism. Will the opposition test to the limit Rawlings' will to make or mar initiatives aimed at democratic reforms in Ghana?

The international financial institutions — the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) — determine the pace of economic reform in Ghana today. Ghana embarked upon the ERSAP in 1983. Widespread redundancies and the ruthless retrenchment of workers in state enterprises, the withdrawal of government subsidies on health and educational services, the privatisation of public enterprises, the selling off of the country's forests, gold and diamond mines to foreign concerns, and the massive devaluation of the local currency, the cedi, ensued.

Today, inflation has been brought down to a more manageable two-digit figure. Public spending has been substantially reduced. There is a consensus that the ERSAP policies are not patriotic and are letting Ghana down. Yet, there is no denying that the Ghanaian economy is better placed than it has been for a long time. The opposition parties are not happy about the performance of the economy. The right says that Rawlings is hampering a more radical liberalisation programme, the left says that he is serving the rich, selling off the economy. The left believes that the growing disparity between the few, privileged economic elite and the rest of the Ghanaian populace is getting out of hand.

The avant garde and the outlandish villas of the *nouveaux riches* have sprung up in Accra's more affluent residential areas. Swimming pools and sports cars abound. Money is being made and lavishly spent. I couldn't help feeling that the money could be better spent on the country's have-nots.

I travelled along Ghana's scenic coastline which is peppered with medieval slave forts, European trading outposts and crumbling castles. The trip gave me time to take stock. Tropical beauty belied the harsh economic and social realities. "Suffering is the spice of life," I read on the back of a *trotro* — the local micro-bus. Ghanaians have political freedom but social justice is still an elusive dream.



A difficult name to pronounce

Hosni Abdel-Rehim interviewed veteran anti-racism activist Leon Schwarzenberg in Paris

During a long, but intermittent stay in Paris, my attention was drawn to a short, elderly man with a peasant's face, full of wrinkles with sharp eyes. His voice sounded "prophetic" with foreboding, and was always warning against transgressing the limits of relations between human beings. In all demonstrations during the '80s and '90s, this old man stood on the front lines in solidarity with the protesters — the unemployed and the immigrants. He was present with the Africans during their sit-in, when they took refuge in churches to protest against mass expulsions. He joined the Arabs who protested against the massacre in Qana, Lebanon. Prior to that, he was one of those who opposed military intervention in Iraq. He participated in all meetings to expedite the provision of assistance to refugees from Rwanda, and to protest against nuclear testing. This old man, who never stops contesting, is Professor Leon Schwarzenberg. He is a very special person — one of the great minds of our time with a strong social conscience.

In addition to being one of the most famous cancer surgeons in the world, he is also most cherished by the persecuted in France. When he hastened to sign the petition for "121 difficult names to pronounce," contesting the new immigration law currently under debate by the 'Assemblée Nationale', thousands followed his lead and signed the petition, too. He took his suitcase and went to the police station to inquire, since his own name is not of franco-phone origin, about the date of his deportation. Other renowned intellectuals also carried their suitcases and accompanied him to the station.

Whatever issue Schwarzenberg may be defending, it is invariably a just cause. Last week I met him in nearly all demonstrations, and in several municipalities where he was launching "secular baptism" for African children, effectively choosing to become the "godfather" of an immigrant child. The predecessor of this tradition was initiated by the French revolutionaries, as a means of reversing "Catholic baptism".

During such a ceremony, I recalled a statement Schwarzenberg made a couple of months ago. It was carried by all news agencies including the Cairo press, and was given front-page coverage in *Al-Ahram*. He declared that he condemned and deplored the torture of Palestinian prisoners inflicted by Israeli authorities, and sanctioned by their judiciary.

I asked Schwarzenberg for an appointment. He agreed to meet me the following morning at the hospital where he performs surgery. Soon after my arrival, however, his secretary walked in and indicated that he was urgently due to examine patients of difficult cancer cases. He has made it his life's work to save the body from cancer and liberate society from hatred and racism. I left him, but with an unspoken appointment to meet at the forthcoming demonstration to contest the implementation of hostile measures against foreigners.

When did your concern for world problems begin?

When the Second World War broke out. I was still young, a contemporary of the National Front. For me, injustice, racism and class discrimination between people were the most outrageous aspects of that period. I joined the resistance and became proficient at guerrilla warfare. I received many medals and decorations for military resistance operations against Nazi occupation.

Our work aimed at emerging from the war in a different world, one from which racial and social discrimination would have been banished. Obviously, however, all that is still going on, and has even increased. This is why I chose to join the persecuted, the immigrants and prisoners; the unemployed and women.

I have never been a member of any political party. The Socialists included my name on their list for the European Parliament, but I was never a partisan of theirs, nor of any other party. In 1988, Michel Rocard chose me to be one of his cabinet ministers. No more than ten days later, I submitted my resignation from my post as health minister. The prime minister had refused my project, in which I proposed HIV tests for all those who are to undergo surgery, for expectant mothers and those planning to be married.

Another item proposed the dispensing of drug substitutes, such as Metadon, to heroin addicts. This would reduce to a large extent AIDS infection by drug syringes. Today Rocard regrets having rejected this project.

What is your overall position regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict?

I champion peace between the Arabs and Israel, but it must be a just peace, entitling the Palestinians to set up a sovereign and independent state. Rabin's project proposed a state under King Hussein's rule. In my opinion, Peres proceeded hastily in conducting the early elections which brought the fundamentalist majority to parliament. I am also convinced that Binyamin Netanyahu is the most anti-semitic person in the world, because he outlines Israeli causes and motives for domination and absolute authority as being Jewish.

I have no doubt that some day a Palestinian state will be established, despite the Israeli fundamentalists. Previously, when we were supporting the liberation of Algeria, the French conservatives and reactionaries did not believe it would happen. Yet, Algeria has been liberated. And tomorrow there will be a Palestinian State.

A democratic state on all of the Palestinian land, comprising Arabs, Jews and all religions would, of course, be ideal. However, there exists certain contradictions between the concept of the state itself and the ecclesiastic state, with regard to the equality of all citizens. All religions tend to discriminate between their followers and others. For instance, the "story about God's chosen people," meaning a people preferred by God to all others, is in direct contradiction with the principles of a secular state.

At any rate, there are only two such cases in existence, Israel and Iran. Fundamentalist trends exist in all religions, and they can be dangerous if they are in control of civil rights, specifically, the right to differ.

What about your stance regarding the immigrant problem?

I do not believe in the existence of what they call the 'immigrant problem.' I believe in the "right of asylum" for all people, irrespective of whether the cause is political or economic. Seeking asylum is a republican right introduced by the revolution. It cannot be revoked without revoking all principles constituting our society and social awareness.

The conjecturing, misinterpretation and demagogic exploitation all started in 1988, when the socialist premier, Michel Rocard, stated, "France cannot host all the misery of the world." Since then we have reached the point of imposing police surveillance on anyone who receives a foreigner as a house guest.

During the last campaign for presidential elections, the National Front Party leader declared, "there can *be no ethnic equality" and the "blacks are good only* for music and dancing." He received 15 per cent of the votes. When, in an electoral bid, the government issues a law embodying the racism and hatred inflamed by the National Front, I am with Saint Juste's saying — "there is no freedom for the enemies of freedom." Any political party that declares its intention to curtail the freedom of others when it comes to power should not enjoy the right of freedom of speech.

Your statement regarding the Palestinian prisoners tortured in Israeli prisons received wide coverage in the Egyptian press. How or when did you first become interested in that problem?

For more than a decade now I've been following torture cases, especially in Latin America. These operations are supervised by "physicians" who determine the limits to be set in torturing a prisoner while attempting to obtain information from him, without causing his death. It is imperative that doctors refuse this kind of inhuman work. It is contrary to the ethics of the profession, which aim at protecting the physical and psychological health of human beings.

We must strive to issue an "honour charter," whereby all doctors who participate in this type of activity should be expelled from practice and ostracised by their colleagues everywhere. Amnesty International's report of August 1996 stated that the Israeli authorities tortured Palestinian prisoners. Furthermore, there were doctors on hand to examine the victims before, during and after the torture procedures. The worst crime of all is that the practice, which takes place by authorisation from a "judge", is classified as "the possibility of exercising physical and bodily pressure".

This is a moral scandal by all measures and criteria and we must not keep silent about it. All torture operations must be stopped, and those performing them must be incriminated and professionally boycotted.

Waterless world

Is there enough water to quench the world's thirst? **Amany Abdel-Moneim** observes world water Day

World Day for Water, observed annually on 22 March, focused on "water resources assessment" this year. The World Water Council, in cooperation with the Moroccan government and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), organised the First World Water Forum from 20-25 March, 1997.

A report assessing the availability and quality of fresh water globally, entitled "Comprehensive Assessment of the Freshwater Resources of the World," was released recently as part of the UN's preparations for the upcoming Earth Summit. According to the report, two-thirds of humanity will suffer from severe water shortages within 30 years as a result of excessive demand and the pollution of water supplies, unless urgent remedial steps are taken.

"Global fresh water supplies are quickly running out," says Abdin Saleh, a programme specialist at Hydrological Sciences and Ecology in Cairo. "Global demand for water has increased dramatically over the past century." Between 1900 and 1995, the demand for water from existing sources has increased more than six-fold. This increase is more than double the rate of population growth during the same period. The rapid rise in demand is a result of increasing irrigation, urban agriculture, industrial growth and rising water consumption per capita for domestic and sanitation purposes.

The report warns that the situation not only puts human health at risk and hampers development, but it also disturbs the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems on which much of the earth's life depends. "There is clear and convincing evidence," the report says, "that the world faces a worsening series of local and regional water quantity and quality problems, largely as a result of poor water allocation, wasteful use of the resource and lack of adequate management resources."

"Current levels of water shortage and pollution are causing widespread public health problems, limiting economic and agricultural development and harming a wide range of ecosystems," Saleh told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "They may put global food supplies in jeopardy and this might lead to economic stagnation in many parts of the world."

Nevertheless, the UN report acknowledges that there are some bright spots. Some countries, particularly in the developed world, have not only achieved significant improvements in water quality, but also "impressive reductions" in the amount of water used for irrigation, industry and municipalities. It adds, however, that "these gains have not reversed either the general trend toward water shortages, or the widespread decline in water quality."

According to Professor Godwin O P Obasi, secretary-general of the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), there is a significant proportion of urban dwellers, particularly in developing countries, who have limited or no access to safe, potable water supplies. Estimates put this figure at 16 per cent worldwide — 21 per cent in Southeast Asia; 22 per cent in the Eastern Mediterranean; and up to 48 per cent in Africa. Another problem, Obasi mentioned, is that as cities expand, so do their water requirements, and it becomes more difficult and expensive to meet this demand.



Children collecting water in India *(photo: Mark Edwards)*

Helsinki discord, Denver carrot

Can Russia be placated for losing its battle to stop NATO's eastward expansion? **Abdel-Malik Khalil** reports from Moscow

Described by a White House representative as "the most *intensive talks in the history of Yeltsin-Clinton meetings*", the Russian-American summit took place in the Finnish capital Helsinki last week.

Top of the agenda were the issues of arms control and NATO's planned eastern expansion. The latter subject is a very prickly issue. Russia strongly opposes NATO's expansion and claims it is a threat to its national security, but NATO says it will go ahead, no matter what Moscow thinks.

Yeltsin tried to reassure Western leaders that Russia presents no threat to its former allies in eastern Europe and warned that the admission of formerly Communist and Warsaw Pact nations to NATO would be a "serious mistake".

Despite being in a wheelchair because of a recent knee operation, President Clinton looked enthusiastic as he arrived in Helsinki for the 20 March meeting. "I think the meeting is going to be good," he told reporters and he made it clear that he thought that Moscow and Washington were ready to overcome disagreements.

The Russian president Boris Yeltsin appeared to be in good health after his recent heart surgery. "I can tell you he feels great. He looks great," Clinton said after meeting Yeltsin.

With goodwill on both sides, it was hoped that the summit, the first meeting of the two presidents since last April, would achieve many important conclusions.

But Moscow stood firm in its opposition to NATO's eastward expansion and insisted that the allies should not accept the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia or the former Soviet republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). At the same time, Moscow asked for guarantees from the allies that neither foreign armies, nor nuclear arms will be located on the territories of those eastern European countries wishing to join NATO. Nevertheless, Yeltsin's political opponents at home accused him of being too soft on the NATO expansion plan at the summit.

If NATO continues to insist on eastward expansion, it seems likely that Russia will turn to the East in desperation and possibly sign a strategic alliance with China when Chinese President Jiang Zemin visits Moscow next month.

It is supposed that the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yegviny Primakov, the mastermind of the new policies towards Eastern countries like China as well as Iran, *will push for closer ties with Russia's southern and eastern* neighbours.

Despite the enthusiasm and optimism around the summit, the discussion of NATO's eastward expansion re*mained the biggest thorn in an otherwise friendly en*counter and the eagerly awaited compromise was not found. The presidents' press secretaries could only say that the meeting was friendly and that the two leaders are in the process of reaching a compromise.

"We weren't competing in races, in which someone wins, while the other loses. We aren't sportsmen. It's a deep issue with far-reaching implications," Yeltsin told reporters.

Clinton's reaction to the talks seems to have been firm as well: "I reaffirmed NATO's enlargement at the Madrid summit and we in NATO will proceed. President Yeltsin made it clear that he thinks our decision is a mistake."

Moscow calls the NATO allies' plans "absolutely unacceptable", because NATO's expansion would isolate Russia and might even mark a return to the times of the Cold War. That's why the NATO question is of vital importance not only for Russia and the USA, but for the rest of the world.

Among the first candidates to join NATO are Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic. Naturally, being ex-Soviet Union partners in the Warsaw Pact and having strong cultural and historical ties with Russia, it is painful for Moscow to accept the idea of these countries joining their common former enemy. Whatever was on their minds, both Clinton and Yeltsin stressed that all European countries should be treated equally. At the same time, French President Jacques Chirac said that all European countries had a right to join NATO.

Thus, Russia seems to be out on a limb, without any serious political support. But despite all its problems, Russia remains an unpleasant opponent which is why Clinton, trying to ease Yeltsin's concerns that Russia would be isolated on the NATO question, said, "Russia would be admitted as a full partner to the exclusive group of economic powers — the G7."

Clinton said that the so-called G-7 would be called "the Summit of the Eight" when it meets in Denver in June.

Though the two leaders failed to reach any compromise on the NATO expansion issue, which was undoubtedly the major subject for discussion, they still issued five statements which outlined agreements on European security, chemical disarmament, anti-ballistic missiles, the future parameters of nuclear arms reduction and economic relations.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**

Assembly debates new investment laws

Four new laws aimed at creating a better investment climate were submitted this week to the People's Assembly for discussion

The People's Assembly this week began debate on a package of four new draft economic laws aimed at boosting Egypt's rate of economic development and creating a more investment-friendly climate.

The first law, known as the Investment Guarantees and Incentives Bill, is part of the government's efforts to quickly scrap existing investment legislation and incorporate their various articles into a single law aimed at doubling investment incentives for both old and new projects.

In terms of investment guarantees, explained Public Sector Minister Atef Ebeid, the draft law states that companies will not be subjected to nationalisation, sequestration or freezing of assets. Additionally, he said, the law states that producers will not be forced to comply with any mandatory pricing systems.

Discussing the draft law, which comes after roughly two years of heated debates and sharp criticism by businessmen, Ebeid emphasised that the new law will retain all incentives, privileges, exemptions and guarantees provided under existing legislation. These incentives apply not only to companies operating in sectors like land reclamation, tourism, oil and industry, but also to other vital, new initiatives such as computer programming, financial leasing projects and projects established by the Social Fund for Development.

The draft law was well received by members of the Assembly's Economic Committee, which is to begin discussing it next week. Mustafa El-Said, the committee's chairman, stated that the legislation is a very progressive step towards the successful execution of the government's ambitious development plans.

El-Said noted that the law puts an end to a bevy of investment laws riddled with conflicting clauses and articles, and provides a "generous" package of incentives.

The government also submitted to the parliament a draft commercial law which aims to improve and simplify commercial transactions in Egypt. Following the cabinet's meeting last week, Justice Minister Farouk Seif El-Nasr explained that the new commercial bill will serve as an umbrella legislation for a variety of commercial sectors. The bill, he said, regulates such basic commercial and banking operations as securities mortgages, bond deposits and letters of guarantee, as well as introducing new articles necessary for coping with modern commercial developments.

For example, said Seif El-Nasr, some of the new articles deal with technology transfer contracts and air transport projects, while others seek to stress the importance of bank cheques over cash in commercial transactions.

The new commercial bill, said Seif El-Nasr, will help create a more investment-friendly environment, especially in light of the fact that the current legislation, which dates back to 1883, is too outdated to cope with current transactions and commercial deals.

"This bill reflects, in part, the government's concerted efforts to undertake comprehensive legislative reforms and create more flexible and useful laws," said the justice minister.

A third law submitted to the parliament for consideration is actually an amendment of the existing Customs Law. The bill aims to lift the ceiling of customs exemptions provided to members of Egyptian diplomatic missions abroad. According to the draft legislation, which will be discussed by the Assembly's Planning and Budgetary Committee, members of diplomatic missions will be entitled to a customs exemption of up to LE10,000 upon returning to Egypt. The law, as it currently stands, allows only for an LE3,000 exemption.

The objective of this law, explained Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri last week, is to relieve Egyptians, both at home and abroad, of customs tax burdens and to attract more Egyptian savings from abroad.

The last bill before the Assembly concerns the "Regulation of Procurement Contracts and Service, Contracting and Selling Procedures." The bill, which is submitted by business tycoons Talaat Mustafa and Mahmoud Hassan, both of whom are members of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), aims to revamp all contract bidding and procurement procedures concluded by state administrative agencies, public sector service enterprises and economic organisations engaged in service, contracting or sales. According to the bill's explanatory note, the law is also aimed at addressing several complications in the current law and introduces some new articles that require a quick government response in times of natural disasters.

Out of the four pieces of legislation submitted for consideration, this bill was the only one to stir up some major controversy in the Assembly. Raafat Seif, a member of the leftist Tagammu Party, contended that the bill was discussed and approved by the Assembly's Proposals and Complaints Committee with surprising speed because "it was submitted by two powerful businessmen who are also MPs."

"This is very ironic given that the Proposals Committee, roughly over the last 20 years, has not approved a bill submitted by opposition MPs," quipped Seif.

The bill, he argues, is tailored to serve the interests of major contractors by providing members of the Federation of Egyptian Contractors, which is headed by Mahmoud Hassan and Talaat Mustafa, a monopoly over bids submitted by all government and public sector agencies.

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Advisory limits

Controversies over businessmen's monopolies and the private sector's priorities in soliciting investments for the economy were stirred up in the wake of Egypt's recent 'door-knock' mission to the United States. Aziza Sami spoke to Shafik Gabr, head of the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt, and a member of the US-Egypt Presidents' Council, about the roles and prerogatives of these bodies

How do you assess the latest 'door-knock' mission to the United States?
AmCham's most recent door-knock mission is one of the most successful missions ever undertaken over the past 12 years. All this has basically come out of the successful re-transformation and development of the Egyptian economy. It is, therefore, estimated that the size of US investments coming to Egypt will definitely exceed that of investments over the past few years.

And, as you are well aware, the US is a very large country, consequently the door-knock mission should be repeated, on a geographic and sectoral basis, several times during the year.

Are there any specific projects currently being negotiated as an outcome of this mission?
AmCham Egypt does not promote specific projects. Businessmen from Egypt go to the US to discuss, on a macro-economic level, what the Egyptian economy is and what business opportunities may be found here.

We discuss, in a generic sense, how Egyptian-American commercial economic investments and technology transfer can be increased. From this effort, we believe that we contribute, in a small way, to the promotion of the government's economic policies in order to create the environment necessary for American business to come to Egypt for trade and investment purposes.

Were there grievances expressed by American businesses concerning Egypt's investment climate?
The American side expressed a very positive reaction. But this does not mean that there was no mention of the need to continue to improve certain aspects of the business environment. There are some laws expected to be presented to parliament during this session which deal with economic issues that can continue to improve the environment.

Why, after 20 years of economic ties between Egypt and the US, has aid — estimated at over $20 billion — been predominant, with direct investments beneficial to GNP growth remaining minimal?
For investment to come to a country, there must be a legal, financial and administrative infrastructure firmly in place. There must also be identification and marketing of business opportunities. In specific response to your question, aid from the US has been extremely useful for Egypt, but... it was also very beneficial to the US, creating an average of 60,000 jobs per year in the US.

Currently, Egypt is working very hard on adding a partnership component to the aid. This new addition has come to be known as the Mubarak-Gore initiative which, coupled with the efforts exerted by the Egyptian government in transforming the economy, is instrumental in promoting an Egyptian-American economic relationship that is multifaceted and not simply limited to financial aid.

Apart from 'selling' the economy at large, what have AmCham and the US-Egypt Presidents' Council done to encourage American investments?
Let me begin by totally separating these two organisations. AmCham is a 14-year-old institution that has worked diligently to bring the opinions of Egypt's business community to the attention of both Egyptian and US governments' economic agencies. The Chamber is very proud that it has contributed to undertaking this role on both sides of the Atlantic.

Today, given the new policies which are conducive to the private sector growth and development, we are witnessing a positive reaction from American business, as revealed by Mubarak's latest visit to the US where business and economic issues played a key role.

The Presidents' Council, however, is an advisory body responsible for advising the US and Egypt's political leadership on a variety of economic issues brought to its attention.

Egyptian businessmen have been criticised for their monopoly of international agencies and their lack of entrepreneurial spirit. There are allegations that the main concern of businessmen working with AmCham and the Presidents' Council is to serve as 'interest brokers' for multinationals that sell commodities and services, rather than seeking to bring in the direct investments needed for GNP growth.
This idea has spread thanks to the media which somehow does not sufficiently cover or assess what is really taking place. I can, however, immediately cite several major contributions to Egypt's GNP made through projects such as those undertaken by Procter and Gamble, Nestlé, General Motors Egypt, Mantrac and Alfa Metal. I am talking about major investments in the fields of industry, food processing, automotives and tourism. These companies are among the same members of AmCham who are being criticised.

Unfortunately, there are people who feel that the private sector should not play a major role in the economy. A visit to any one of the new industrial cities, such as 6 October, Sadat City and 10th of Ramadan, will show that the private sector is playing a major role in economic development and is currently contributing to over 50 per cent of Egypt's GNP.

We should be very careful when we discuss brokerage companies and agencies because they too contribute to the GNP. There are countries that have achieved economic success through such activities.

What is the Presidents' Council position on the controversial issue of early enforcement of GATT patent laws, as demanded by multinational companies, relating to the Egyptian pharmaceuticals industry?
We have taken ourselves completely out of the debate and have no position, whatsoever, on the matter. It is a very complicated, technical issue that only the Egyptian government, with its agencies, has the resources to resolve. Only the government can take a decision that is in the interests of the Egyptian economy.

Does the Presidents' Council often adopt such a neutral stance on other issues?
If we can't give recommendations on an issue, then we don't. How can we advocate something we don't know anything about?

President Mubarak recently asserted that the Presidents' Council is an advisory, and not a decision-making, body. Has the Council overstepped its role?
I can personally assure you that the Council does not make public pronouncements on any issues except those that have been made public by the government of Egypt.

Lebanon lifts potatoes ban

A BAN by the Lebanese authorities on *the importation of potatoes left Egyptian* exports stranded for two weeks in Lebanese ports. But the crisis is over thanks to a high-level visit. Mona El Fiqi reports.

Shipments of Egyptian potatoes were left waiting customs clearance for nearly two weeks in Lebanese ports following a decision by the Lebanese Minister of Agriculture, Shawki Fakhouri, to halt his country's importation of potatoes.

The decree caused confusion among Egyptian exporters shipping their potatoes to Lebanon in accordance with an agreement signed by the Egyptian and Lebanese governments allowing Egypt to export potatoes to Lebanon during four weeks of the four-month potato season: from 12 February to 15 March.

The decree, passed on 6 March by the Lebanese minister of agriculture wrong-footed Egyptian exporters who were busy sending their potato shipments to Lebanon. Minister Fakhouri said that the decree aimed to protect home-grown potatoes.

A Lebanese source told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the problem was settled during the visit of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri to Cairo last week.

"After discussing the problem with his Egyptian counterpart, Al-Hariri ordered the shipments to enter Beirut port as of 21 March," the source said, pointing out that the ban had not been imposed solely on Egyptian exports and was not intended to harm commercial ties with Egypt.

Nevertheless, said Khaled Abu Ismail, head of the Egyptian Federation for Chambers of Commerce, the entire situation could have been averted had Lebanese officials consulted with their Egyptian counterparts prior to ordering the ban.

Presidents' Council's mandate questioned

The Presidents' Council, usually working to resolve problems, faced a few of its own during Mubarak's visit to the US earlier this month, writes Nevine Khalil

Pinpointing and removing obstacles to investment and trade between Egypt and the US is the goal of the joint US-Egypt Presidents' Council, but Egyptian officials complain that some Council members have tried to assume executive responsibilities. The complaint, aired during President Hosni Mubarak's visit last week to the US, referred specifically to statements made to the press by some members of the Council, which was formed as part of the US-Egypt Partnership in Economic Development Programme.

"The people are sometimes confused and think the Presidents' Council has executive powers," said Mubarak during an interview with Good Morning Egypt. "A number of them have made statements [to that effect], but we have put an end to all such statements."

Elaborating, Mubarak explained that the Presidents' Council is only an advisory body concerned with resolving problems confronting US and Egyptian businessmen. "It has no executive powers," stressed the president. "These lie solely in the hands of the government."

Further confusing the issue was the fact that the Council's two-year term is scheduled to expire this spring, meaning that a reshuffling of its members will take place soon. And while rumours are rife about possible changes, the decision on who will serve on the Egyptian side lies exclusively in the hands of Mubarak. The president, however, has refused to disclose what criteria will be used in choosing the new members. Moreover, it is still unclear how extensive, if at all, will be the changes in its ranks. An informed source, however, revealed that businessmen will be appointed, or reappointed, "according to how interactive they are with current policies, as well as their general performance and efficiency."

Problems and allegations aside, it was business as usual for Council members who were scrambling to prepare for a meeting convened hastily on the eve of Mubarak's departure to Chicago last week. "The meeting was set to take place when Gore visited Egypt in the spring," said one source. "Therefore, the Council members were unprepared for the Washington meeting." To meet the deadline, businessmen worked long nights outlining the meeting's agenda, which included means of expanding trade between the two countries, and increasing the flow of US investments and technology transfer to Egypt.

Although sources stated that the meeting went smoothly, a number of controversial issues remain outstanding on the Council's agenda. Topping this list is the establishment of a free trade zone between Egypt and the US, an initiative which has met with resistance in the US Congress despite support from the Clinton administration. Also yet to be resolved is the debate over the US request for the immediate implementation of patent rights agreements in Egypt prior to the end of the 10-year grace period afforded by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). "This is something Egypt will not do;" said a top Egyptian official.

As part of his efforts to promote Egypt in the US, Mubarak also met with several key US businessmen, world financial leaders and foreign investors during his visit. Egypt's goal now, after showcasing its economic reforms and progress at the Cairo Economic Conference (MENA III) last year, is to highlight business opportunities, boost US investments and trade between the two countries, as well as pave the way for technology transfer.

To this end, Mubarak hosted a dinner which one guest described as "$400 billion sitting at the dinner table." The dinner at Blair House, with five international financial leaders including the president of the World Bank and the chairman of the New York Stock Exchange in attendance, provided the guests a chance to discuss investment opportunities in Egypt, the country's entry into the global market and its ambitious New Delta project.

"The meeting was very satisfactory and highly productive," said John Wolfenson, president of the World Bank. Egypt, he added, has now been placed "very high" on the world economic map.

Capping his US trip with a stop in Chicago, Mubarak then met with 500 guests at a business lunch hosted by the Mid-America Committee and the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. In his speech, the Egyptian president urged chief executive officers and senior executives of multinational corporations, as well as the Egyptian and Arab professional community, to increase their business in Egypt.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

175 Taba, a one-square-kilometre triangle at the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba, was the subject of two major international disputes spanning the 20th century. The first, in 1906, pitted the Ottoman government against Egypt which had the support of the British occupation authorities. The second was a sequel to the implementation in 1982 of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty's military provisions. In Taba I, the Ottoman government bowed to a British ultimatum and pulled its troops out of the territory. In Taba II, international arbitration settled the issue of Taba's ownership in Egypt's favour, and Israel withdrew in 1989. The story of Taba I is told here by **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk**, on the basis of reports published in *Al-Ahram*

It may come as news to some that Taba, that corner of the Sinai located at the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba which was the subject of heated dispute between Israel and Egypt from 1985-88, had actually been the subject of a territorial rivalry 80 years previously. But how different Taba I was from Taba II, in spite of the common factors that link these two struggles over the same piece of territory.

Whereas the latter day Taba crisis was the product of an Israeli attempt to push back Egypt's eastern borders in order to gain a larger window on the Gulf of Aqaba, Taba I was the focus of a conflict between the Ottoman government and Egypt. The Egyptian government in that struggle was backed by the British occupation authorities, in whose interests it was to be in a controlling position over the Gulf of Aqaba.

Also, in contrast to Taba II which was brought before an international arbitration panel, the Ottomans were reluctant to pursue this route in settling the first Taba dispute. Indeed, Egypt at the time was at least a de jure if not de facto part of the Ottoman empire. The Supreme Porte, therefore, felt no need to prove that the territory in dispute was part of Ottoman land nor did it want to implicitly confer upon Egypt the status of an independent nation. A third difference is that the Turkish occupation of Taba almost led to a conflagration, whereas the more recent dispute over this piece of land was settled through negotiations that occurred in the wake of a military confrontation.

The original Taba crisis began at the start of 1906 when a Turkish force occupied this notorious spot of land on the pretext that a force of Egyptian border soldiers under the command of a British officer had established a camp there, thereby threatening Aqaba where a branch of the Hijaz railway, which Ottomans were building, was supposed to terminate. When it was notified that its soldiers had crossed into Egyptian territory, the government of Istanbul responded that there existed no boundaries between the sovereign and the subject and it accused the British of trying to weaken the ties between Egypt and the Supreme Porte in order to ultimately bring about a de jure separation. The Egyptian government, with the backing of the British occupation authorities, responded that the Ottoman act was in contravention of the Ottoman firman promulgated in 1892 upon the ascension to the khedival throne of Abbas Helmi II. Through this firman and an appended telegramme, the Supreme Porte officially recognised that the border between Egypt and Ottoman territories lying to the east extended from Rafah in the north to Umm Rishrash (present-day Eilat) in the south. Tensions escalated when Great Britain moved to intervene directly, claiming that the aim of the Turkish occupation of Taba was to threaten that vital artery of the British Empire — the Suez Canal. When London issued an ultimatum to Istanbul and moved several of its warships into the Gulf of Aqaba, Istanbul had to bow to the logic of superior might and withdraw its forces. The Ottomans also had to yield to the British demand to demarcate the border between Egypt and Ottoman territories to the east. London was no longer content with the delimitation of the boundaries that had been established in 1892. The process which took place during the remainder of 1906 involved laying specifically agreed upon landmarks along the line of demarcation. Ninety-one such landmarks were laid out, the last of which was placed on the spur of the mountain at Taba. It was the location of this landmark that the Israelis sought to shift, precipitating the second Taba crisis 80 years later.

The Egyptian-Ottoman dispute over Taba at the beginning of this century placed those involved in the Egyptian national movement on the horns of a dilemma. To support Egyptian control over Taba was to back the British occupation authorities and the removal of one of the final obstacles before full-fledged British suzerainty over the country. To side with the Ottomans on the other hand would be to condone an encroachment upon a portion of national territory. The dilemma precipitated a rift within the nationalist movement. Mustafa Kamel through his newspaper, *Al-Liwa*, took the former position, exposing his wing of the nationalist movement to vehement criticism. Much of this criticism was aired in *Al-Jarida*, a new newspaper that began publication only weeks after the dispute was resolved. This newspaper, owned and run by Ahmed Lutfi El-Sayed, advocated Egyptian independence from both the British and the Ottomans. Both *Al-Jarida* and the subsequent founding of the Umma Party which marked Egypt's first experience in partisan politics, owe their inception largely to Taba.

Unfortunately, research of this episode has relied heavily on *Al-Liwa*, *Al-Jarida* and another nationalist newspaper, *Al-Mu'ayyid*, while scholars gave little attention to other newspapers, foremost among which was *Al-Ahram*. Perhaps they thought that *Al-Ahram* would remain aloof and equivocal. If so, they could not have been further off the mark. It most certainly did take a stance, and a remarkable one at that.

Initially, the press imagined that the occupation of that area by a small Turkish force was no more than a minor incident. Indeed, it was more likely that most Egyptians at the time had never heard of Taba and if they had, it was unlikely whether they knew whether it was subject to Egyptian or to Ottoman administration. Even after the British had stationed a warship off the coast of the area in dispute and occupied Pharaoh's Island, *Al-Ahram* described the incident as a mere "quarrel". As events unfolded, the description would prove to be less than apt.

On 9 February 1906, under the headline "The Aqaba incident: its insignificance and its gravity", *Al-Ahram* argued that while the incident should not be belittled, it should not be blown out of proportion. According to the newspaper, the five military outposts that the Egyptian government had set up between Aqaba and Al-Arish were interpreted by the government in Istanbul as part of the British attempt to sever Egypt from the Ottoman Empire.

Al-Ahram expressed its concern that an escalation of the crisis would further the causes of British hegemony over Egypt. Its fears were well placed. From the outset, it insisted that the Taba crisis was a matter that should remain solely between the Egyptian and Ottoman governments and that if any British intervention were required, it should be restricted to a purely intermediary role at the request of the Egyptian government. However, the British "have brought the matter to a new phase by sending the warship Diana to Pharaoh's Island in Aqaba."

Al-Ahram was also alarmed by the fact that some Arab newspapers portrayed the incident in provocative religious terms as a war between Christian Britain and the Islamic Caliphate.

At first it appeared to *Al-Ahram* that there were hopes that the Taba question could be resolved through direct negotiations between Istanbul and Cairo. Negotiations indeed were held in Cairo during the first half of April 1906.

Al-Ahram heartily welcomed the negotiations as they seemed to answer its prayers for excluding the direct involvement of the British in the issue. It covered the sessions scrupulously.

Evidently, *Al-Ahram*'s hopes that these negotiations would "resolve the problem in a manner satisfactory to all" had little chance of fulfilment. Secret documents published at a later stage reveal that it was the objective of the government of Istanbul to use the negotiating process in order to gain time so as to impose the de facto reality it had established by stationing troops in Taba. It also hoped to gain some respite following British moves to augment the pressures it brought to bear on Istanbul.

Al-Ahram commented sombrely: "The positions of the two sides are far apart and their demands are extremely divergent."

In this charged climate the government of Istanbul embarked on an action that would contribute to exacerbating the tenor of religious rhetoric in the Egyptian press. On 2 March of that year, Istanbul promulgated a Sultanic edict proclaiming that "the Gulf of Aqaba and the areas in its immediate vicinity shall constitute a *sanjaq* (administrative district) subordinate to the *vilaya* (province) of the Hijaz, in the hopes of augmenting the consequence of this area in dispute between the Supreme Porte on the one hand and Egypt and England on the other." The edict delineated this new *sanjaq* as comprising the entire Gulf of Aqaba inclusive of its eastern and western banks. On its western shore, the borders would extend from Aqaba to Ras Mohammed and therefore include a large stretch falling between the Gulf of Aqaba and the Gulf of Suez.

By including these territories under the administration of the Hijaz, Istanbul hoped to forestall any British military action against the sites in Aqaba occupied by Turkish forces, notably Taba, for such an action would then be construed as an attack upon the Islamic holy lands. At the same time, the Sultan dispatched a missive to the khedive asking, "Are you with Islam and the Caliph or not?"

With Istanbul having upped the stakes in this manner, it would not be long before Britain would act against the hopes of Egyptian nationalists — that the Taba question would remain a purely Egyptian-Ottoman affair — and escalate the issue into a confrontation between Istanbul and London. The British authorities proclaimed that a spirit of religious fanaticism was spreading in Egypt, threatening the lives of Europeans living in the country. This was the same pretext the British had used a quarter of a century previously to justify their occupation of the country and to win international support for their continued presence in Egypt. In his statements to the British parliament, Sir Edward Gray, then foreign secretary, said, "The sermons in the mosques in Cairo and the statements in the Islamic Arabic newspapers are betraying a new surge of fanaticism among the populace."

This paved the way for the second move which was to increase the number of soldiers in the British garrison in Egypt. This took place amidst great fanfare in the British press, excerpts of which were relayed in *Al-Ahram*. Although the troops only increased by a thousand (from 5,000 to 6,000), the objective of this highly publicised move was twofold: firstly as a visible show of strength and, secondly, to punish what the British press termed "rabble-rousers". Since, as was known, the Egyptian government had to bear the expenses of the occupying army, an increase of troops naturally brought with it a heavier burden on the national treasury.

On the diplomatic front, Great Britain acted to bring an end to the communications between Egyptian and Ottoman authorities that might have led to a negotiated solution. This move was determined in a meeting between the khedive and Lord Cromer on 26 April after which it was announced that "the government of Egypt has officially placed this matter in the hands of Great Britain."

Al-Ahram reported later that Istanbul was considering international arbitration which it had consistently rejected since the crisis began. As *Al-Ahram* reports, "The Supreme Porte does not refuse arbitration. It is of little concern to the government of Istanbul whether that leads to the establishment of borders. All that concerns it is the Gulf of Aqaba in order to link the distant corners of the Empire." A few days later "not refuse" was transformed into more affirmative tones when *Al-Ahram* reported that the government of Istanbul had announced that it was "prepared to accept arbitration."

This was too late. *Al-Ahram* of 5 May 1906 announced to its readers that the government in London had threatened to move the British fleet into Turkish waters if the Ottoman government did not comply with its demands. These demands were "to establish the borders on the basis of the agreement of 1892 according to which England understands that the Supreme Porte has appended the Sinai peninsula to Egypt and to withdraw Ottoman troops from Taba in the process of demarcating the border."

The declaration provoked "deep consternation" in Ottoman official circles after they had ascertained London's preparedness to act upon its ultimatum. There were numerous signs that the British were serious in this regard. British warships had gathered in the Mediterranean in preparation for naval manoeuvres serving as a warning to the Turkish government. Last but not least, the British ambassador in Istanbul delivered a most blatantly worded ultimatum. "If the Ottoman soldiers do not withdraw from Taba, England will be obliged to use force. The government of England has no intention of speaking further on this matter."

It was not long before reports in *Al-Ahram* indicated that the British had begun to put their ultimatum into effect. "A new battalion of British soldiers arrived today and another cavalry regiment is expected to arrive shortly," reads one such news item in early May. Before this display of British military power, Istanbul had no choice but to back down. This occurred on 14 May. "Thank God! The Dispute is Over" blazons *Al-Ahram*'s headline of that day. By submitting, the newspaper comments, the Ottomans "have relieved themselves of the antagonism of a very powerful and very cunning nation that knows how to turn the most insignificant situation to its advantage."

An official statement by the Ottoman government announced the withdrawal of its troops from Taba.

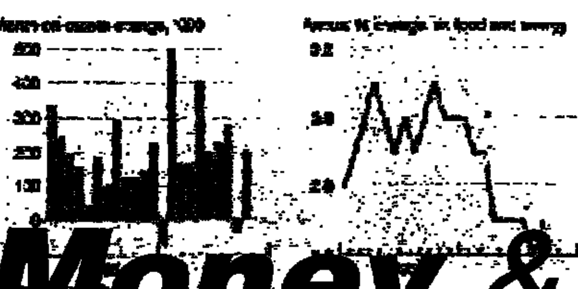


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German companies at the Cairo Fair

GERMANY is one of the largest exhibitors in the Cairo International Fair. This participation reflects growing interest of German businessmen investing in Egypt, which is considered the biggest market in the Middle East, Wolf Deitrich, the German ambassador, said.

He noted that 30 German companies are displaying their products in the fair. He also said that the volume of commercial exchange with Egypt amounts to LE4.5 billion, representing an increase of 12.7 per cent over the previous year.



Money & Business

Egypt-Morocco free zone

A PRELIMINARY meeting will be held in Cairo to discuss the possibility of creating a free zone between Egypt and Morocco.

El-Said Abul-Qumsan, head of the Foreign Trade Sector at the Ministry of Food Supply and Trade, stated that a second meeting will be held later in Morocco to iron out the finer details of the agreement concerning duty exemptions. He added that the two countries will take the necessary measures in case of dumping, giving each country the right to demand compensation in the event of this taking place.

NBE's pioneering role in the development process

IN LIGHT of the state's strategic objectives and economic reform programme, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) has punched its weight against boosting the privatisation programme and developing the money market.

It is noteworthy that amidst the drive for widening ownership base, NBE has offered a part of its equity participation in the joint companies and banks. As a result, some 19 companies were totally or partially sold at some LE646 million.

In tandem, NBE has propelled the development process via direct equity participation in new projects with a minority stake ranging from 5 to 15 per cent leaving room for private and specialised capital to grip about 30 to 40 per cent, whereas the remaining would be offered for public subscription. Needless to reiterate that such steps would in their turn widen ownership base and totally boost the money market.

It is therefore no accident that NBE has joined hands with specialised institutions to establish two new companies, namely the Suez Steel Co and Misr Cement Co.

In fact, Suez Steel Co was established in line with Investment Law No. 230 for 1989 with authorised capital amounting to LE600 million and issued capital of LE120 million distributed among 1.2 million shares with a nominal value of LE100 per share. The project is situated in the Governorate of Suez and aims at producing 600 thousand tons annually. Founders have raised 70 per cent of the capital and the remaining quota was offered for public subscription where it was nearly four-fold covered within 10 days therefore, trimming allocation to just 23 per cent for every subscriber.

In the meanwhile, Misr Cement Co was established under Law No. 150 for 1981 with authorised capital of LE600 million and issued capital of LE300 million distributed among 30 million shares with a nominal value of LE10 per share.

It is projected that real production would start in 2000 with annual productive capacity of 1.2 million tons. The company's plants will be established in the Koft area of Qena Governorate to assume the role of the main supplier for the needs of the huge development projects south of the valley and along the Red Sea.

Founders have raised 70 per cent of the company's capital whereas the remaining 30 per cent was offered for public subscription. It is noteworthy that the offered stake was ten-fold covered within 10 days reducing allocation to 10 per cent for each subscriber.

Needless to reiterate that NBE holds equity participation in 107 projects with a total participation of LE1.6 billion. The said figures would mount to LE2.1 billion in 162 enterprises when adding indirect equity participation.

In fact, NBE is keen to build a strong brand image of efficient banking, that enhances the development march and boosts the privatisation process.

Faisal Bank's investments reach LE6.1 billion

Figures from 1993 until the third quarter of 1997

THE VOLUME of Faisal Islamic Bank's transactions for the third quarter of the current fiscal year indicate an upward trend in the performance of the bank. This increase, which included deposits and investment portfolios, resulted in achieving a surplus of 43 per cent over the year 1993.

Indicators	June 1993	June 1994	May 1995	May 1996	Growth rate (per cent)	Until 8/2/1997 (LE mn)
Total assets	5461	5615	6227	6325	17.70	6876
Deposits	4333	4511	4933	5101	17.70	5120
Bank's revenues	441	451	508	583	32.20	609 (nine months only)
Investment balance	4752	5042	5665	5826	23.30	6127
Total revenues	261	251	350	368	41.00	300 (nine months only)
Surplus	222	211	304	318	43.22	262 (nine months only)
Return for investment accounts	199	201	246	275	38.20	222 (nine months only)

First MegaStore in Egypt

MULTIMEDIA MegaStores have opened the first in a series of retail outlets for computers and electronic products in Heliopolis last week.

The MegaStore will provide the consumer, for the first time in Egypt, with a wide choice of brands ranging from computers, peripherals, software, games, telephones and GSMs, televisions and Hi-Fis, to accessories and supplies.

These MegaStores will offer the shopper state-of-the-art technology at reasonable prices. They will carry a wide range of brand-names available in the Egyptian market. In the computing field, which is one of their main lines of business, all reputable brands such as IBM, Hewlett-Packard, Packard Bell, Compaq, Texas Instruments, Sony, Toshiba and many others are being displayed and sold. In addition, compatible and locally assembled computers are also being sold. "This is precisely why we have established the Multimedia MegaStores; to offer our customers all the variety as well as the right to choose," said Nashaat Iskandar, the chain's president. "The Heliopolis branch on 51 Beirut Street is the first of several outlets in Cairo, Alexandria, and some other governorates that we plan to open in 1997," added Iskandar. In two months' time, Multimedia MegaStores will schedule its next opening, which will be on 162B 26 July Street, Agouza.

Iskandar promises "Satisfaction of our customers is our primary goal."

Business news

Water treatment plant in Fayoum

MOHAMED Hasan Tantawi, governor of Fayoum, signed an agreement with the ambassador of the Netherlands to set up a water treatment station with a capacity of 7,500 litres/sec.

The new plant will cost LE84 million and will be financed by the government of the Netherlands. The project falls within the framework of cooperative agreements signed between the two countries a few years ago.

New hospital in Sharm El-Sheikh

DR ISMAIL Sallam, Egyptian health minister, stated that the soon to be opened Sharm El-Sheikh Hospital will compete with the biggest hospitals around the world with respect to its state-of-the-art medical equipment and highly efficient specialists.

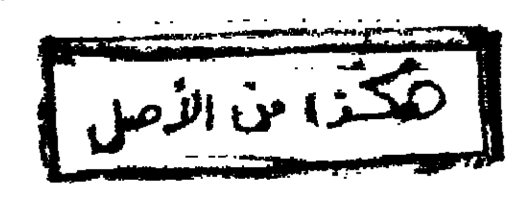
Sallam, who paid a visit to the hospital recently, added that the hospital will provide services for people in Sharm El-Sheikh, and in other neighbouring cities.

23 new projects in Abu Rawash

GIZA GOVERNOR Abdul-Rahim Shehata said they had approved 23 new industrial projects in the Abu Rawash industrial zone at a total cost of LE138.5 million. These projects are expected to provide at least 2,400 job opportunities.

In his meeting with members of the Giza Investment Office, Shehata added that within one month the Abu Rawash telephone exchange will be ready and that studies are being conducted to set up a new sewage network.

Moreover, the area will be provided with an electrical feeding station to serve the various activities there.



Letter from Jerusalem

Suicide bombers, red cows and the Copenhagen Declaration; **Azmi Bishara** puzzles over the state of Israeli society today and wonders which, cold peace behind an iron curtain, or a normalisation rejected by the Arabs, will triumph

Whatever the motives for last Friday's suicide operation, committed against civilians who happened to be sitting in a café in Tel Aviv, it is high time to engage in moral and political scrutiny of these kinds of operations. Even if we assume that the Palestinians are engaged in total war against Israel — and this is only the case by virtue of a historical conjuncture — that does not justify any party taking any action it sees fit. Even in wars, military attacks are directed against specific targets, whereas random bombing is a war crime. Killing people who happened to be taking a bus or sitting in a café cannot be called a legitimate struggle. I am fully aware that many people will immediately cite the long list of Israeli crimes against Palestinian and Lebanese civilians as justification. This is not justification, however, but merely a statement of the obvious: to wit, that Israel is the prime cause of all the afflictions of the region. Still, this does not justify, socially or ethically, those who exploit the frustration and despair of young Palestinians and use them as living bombs. What sort of Palestinian society do we want? What sort of upbringing will we give our young people? All the justifications for suicide operations have become banal, and no longer convince anyone. We know very well that there is something ethically wrong in driving a young man to the point of suicide simply in order to kill civilians. Even more tragic is *the fact that such operations take place* within a political strategy vacuum; not even Palestinian armed struggle provides a strategic framework. (Is that option still open? I do not know, and I know nobody who can answer this question.)

What I do know for certain is that every Palestinian, adult or child, dreams of the overthrow of Oslo. But this in itself is not an option — merely the overthrow of a failed option. Israel accuses Hamas of fighting, not to bring down Oslo, but to serve Arafat's aims of putting pressure on Israel and thus increasing his own negotiating weight. The question here is whether Hamas has really accepted the peace process and the idea of consolidating Arafat's bargaining position by putting pressure on Israel. Even such a far-fetched scenario does not indicate that Hamas has worked out a coherent strategy, although it may indicate that the PA does have a strategy — which entails using Hamas to its own end. Certainly, the PA has a strategy of sorts. This can be summed up as follows: salvaging the staggering peace process with Israel. Unfortunately, though, *the PA has neither a political* nor an economic strategy for the Palestinian society it seeks to build. The conditions of the Palestinian people have greatly deteriorated socially and economically since the signing of Oslo, while human rights, even in comparison with the situation during the occupation, are in a dismal condition. Thus, while the PA possesses a strategy in foreign affairs, based on negotiations with Israel under very inopportune conditions, it has no domestic policy at all. Similarly, the Palestinian opposition has neither a foreign nor a domestic policy. All its actions remain imprisoned in its efforts to defend democracy and human rights against the PA's onslaughts. This is why military operations carried out by the Palestinian opposition are a reflection of its crises rather than an expression of strategy. Deteriorating Palestinian political economic and social conditions *continue to provide the opposition with desperate young people to serve as cannon fodder.*

The Israeli leadership, in contrast, weighs its moves largely in light of domestic policy considerations. This is why Netanyahu is now proposing a move forward, to the final status negotiations (a proposition that is not all that new: he proposed it hours after being elected, but was turned down at the time by the Palestinians). The main concern here is to restore unity in the Likud-religious parties coalition — perhaps even to form a new national unity coalition based on the Eitan-Beilin understandings. Thus, Israel can circumvent its Oslo commitments, which are subject to controversy among the Israeli right. Through such a proposal, Israel will turn redeployment into a bargaining chip that must be met by Palestinian concessions on questions such as sovereignty, the status of Jerusalem and refugee-related issues. Already, the Israeli campaign to blackmail the Palestinians by demanding that the PA make new commitments to guaranteeing the security of Israel, as a pre-condition for the continuation of the negotiations, has begun.

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The red cow

Last week, the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* broke the good news: a red cow was born in an Israeli village. According to traditional Judaism, the *ashes of a red cow are necessary to purify* Temple Mount so that the Israelites can enter it. Orthodox Jews who, at least theoretically, represent the majority of *the people of Israel*, decreed that no Jew should enter Temple Mount after the second destruction of the temple there. The strangest aspect of this whole story is that the *Ha'aretz* correspondent treated it very seriously, as if the birth of the red cow was about to change the history of the entire region. He reported that the cow had been isolated from the other cattle, and is now being reared under the supervision of the "Temple Institute", which is based in the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem. The institute in question is composed of lunatic extremists who occupy themselves producing models of the second temple so that these can be used to re-build it once the *Haram Al-Sharif* is destroyed.

Lately, the Israeli minister of education has allocated 120,000 shekels to this institute, a sum probably destined to buy fodder for the red cow. The irony in all this — if there is any irony in it at all — *is that the same Ministry of Education* and Culture which finances state-of-the-art universities and institutes also finances the Temple Institute, and that supposedly enlightened papers such as *Ha'aretz* treat the myth of the red cow very seriously.

Clearly, modern Israeli society, said to be economically and scientifically advanced, suffers from profound schizophrenia, divided between its superstitious sentiments and its rationalism. Any conception of Israel as a modern and rational society is erroneous, and does not take into account the complex nature of a society in which superstition and irrationality are characteristic components.

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An Egyptian delegation

Very few Palestinians, and probably even fewer Israelis, heard about the Egyptian delegation of intellectuals who support the peace process which recently visited Israel. The intellectuals formed an international alliance in Copenhagen which included Egyptians, Palestinians, Jordanians and Israelis. The document they issued in Copenhagen continues to *arouse great controversy among* Egyptian intellectuals — yet it would seem that nobody in Israel has even heard about the document or the event itself. In contrast with Egyptian public opinion, the Israelis do not seem to care at all about the Copenhagen Declaration. The majority of Egyptians oppose cultural normalisation with Israel, even more than they do political and economic normalisation. Their opinion is that no cultural legitimacy should be bestowed on Israel unless a just and lasting peace is established. Some of the Egyptians opposed to cultural normalisation, though, phrase their opposition in the same language that was popular in the fifties and sixties — a language that has proven obsolete in dealing with present-day realities. Overall, the rejection of any cultural normalisation remains a positive phenomenon; it needs to be transformed, however, into a democratic weapon for struggle against basic Zionist premises. What may need special attention is the fact that the Egyptian delegation, led by Lutfi El-Kholi, was totally ignored by the Israeli side. This, and the absence of attention accorded to the Copenhagen Declaration, demonstrates that the current Israeli establishment is not at all interested in normalisation. The Labour Party's Israel may be interested; as for the Israel which belongs to the right and the religious parties, it is only interested in a cold Israeli peace with the Arabs, one that would enable Israel to continue living behind an iron curtain.

The writer is an Arab member of the Israeli Knesset.



An organisation of abject states

As the Islamic world continues to reel from a series of catastrophes, from Palestine to Bosnia, **Eqbal Ahmad**, in Islamabad, wonders if this week's OIC meeting will offer anything more than flowers and flags — rhetoric, expense and diversion

Islamabad is aglow with flowers and flags. Security is tight, the airport has been closed, the city is virtually sealed, and armed men are deployed all along to protect the important visitors. they are 11 heads of state, 3 prime ministers, 4 vice presidents, 3 crown princes, and 21 countries are represented by their foreign ministers. Their agenda is truly grand for its singularity: problems facing the Ummah. Will they do anything more than pass resolutions to defend the greatly menaced lands, freedoms, and sovereignties of the peoples they represent?

The Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) is committed to advancing and defending the interests of the Islamic world. As such it could not be meeting in Islamabad at a more crucial time. For, never in fourteen centuries had the Muslim world faced crises more grave or menaces more imminent. It would take a book to describe these but the description is barely needed as even our ill-educated school boys can present a list of the violations, indignities, threats, and oppression which the people who inhabit Muslim majority areas are undergoing. So here we recall only the most 'clear and present' dangers, and only the lands and the peo*ples who are imminently at risk.*

Immediate, forceful and substantive policies are essential to forestall more catastrophes. If the OIC dignitaries in Islamabad produce no more than empty words, they will inflict more harm than they mean upon the hapless people of Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, the Arab world at large, Bosnia, and Kashmir. For, their vacuous declaration will again be viewed — by adversaries no less than false allies and arbiters — as a sign of abject weakness and dependance in a dying civilisation. Birds of prey, after all, prey on the vulnerable.

Take Palestine first: Under the cover of an American sponsored "peace process", it is being colonised at a pace faster than at most other periods under Israeli occupation. In a fundamental sense the Palestinian predicament today is much worse than it was before Yasser Arafat signed the Oslo Accords. Western, especially American suggestions, that the Oslo process is leading toward a two state solution — one Jewish and the other Arab — should *fool no one except those who are desperate to be fooled.* The truth is that Palestine is being transformed into an apartheid state under Israeli sovereignty.

Two communities will inhabit the remnant of Palestine — barely a quarter of the country in 1947 — we call the West Bank and Gaza. One speaks Arabic, the other Hebrew. One is Muslim and Christian, the other Jewish. One has citizenship rights, the other does not. One is free to roam the land, travel its roads, use its resources, and claim all the rights under the law plus some more including the privilege *to carry arms*, settle on native lands, and terrorise those who resist colonisation. The other, unarmed and denuded of all fundamental rights of citizenship, is denied nearly all freedoms including the right to free ravel inside the country. Israel controls the land and the movement of people therein. The so-called Palestinian Authority does not. Israel has sovereignty over the land and controls all movement in and out. The Palestinian Authority is granted carefully circumscribed 'autonomy' which applies not to the land but only to the people who live in enclaves delinked from each other by Israeli settlements and military posts. *This scandalous state of affairs* enjoys the cover of international treaties (Oslo and Cairo), support of the United States, collaboration of Yasser Arafat, and complicity of the Arab and the self-styled 'Islamic' countries.

Understandably, Israel is inclined to test the limits of Arab weakness and the powerless gesticulations of organisations such as the OIC. Their latest, *and hopefully last, testing* ground is Jerusalem, a city sacred to three religious communities. Israel is committed to establishing its messianic monopoly over this most unique monument to ecumenism. *It has formally annexed the city and has since been busy* turning it into "the eternal capital of Israel." In a systematic plan of colonisation, its Labour no less than Likud governments ringed the ancient city with state sponsored Jewish settlements built on expropriated Arab land. Then they began to penetrate the inner city where Jewish fanatics, including General Ariel Sharon, have planted themselves all around the *Haram al-Sharif*. An entire quarter, the former 'Jewish quarter' of Jerusalem, has been cleaned out of its Arab residents. Last year dozens of Palestinians died protesting and the OIC too issued a lifeless denunciation. Yet, the tourist tunnel which Israel's sectarian government forced open under Al-Aqsa mosque remains open. The zealots of Zion openly advocate the destruction of the historic mosque to con*struct on its site the temple they believe to have* been demolished in Roman times. Israel's government disavows such an intention. But if past record of Israeli disavowals is an indication, Al-Aqsa is at risk unless, that is, Israel and the United States are given cause to believe that there is a limit to the verbal bombast of the rulers of the OIC countries. Abu Ghneim is Israel's latest point of advance.

I presume that a Lebanese delegation is attending the OIC conference. A portion of this tormented land is also under Israeli occupation. There, at least the resistance against occupation has not been compromised by a 'peace process' that consolidates a barely disguised occupation, and creates a state of apartheid in the Middle East. It is notable that despite its overwhelming power and the support it enjoys of the United States, Israel is not able to consolidate *its conquest in Lebanon, a fact which* contradicts the argument that Arafat's only alternative was Oslo. Lebanon deserves, nevertheless, a substantive gesture of solidarity. Israel is determined to deny Lebanon its rightful role as the Arab world's commercial centre. So it acts to prevent Lebanon's reconstruction. Typically, the target of Israel's recent invasions have been Lebanon's infrastructure and the morale of its people.

The United States government's consistent support for Israel despite its aggressions and violations in Palestine and Lebanon is often attributed to the "Jewish lobby" in the United States, an impression which American officials quietly encourage. It is comfortable after all to let the burden of their cynical Middle Eastern policy pass to a lobby. The truth is that the predicaments of Palestine and Lebanon are symptomatic of a historic strategic development which is taking place in the Middle East. In the struggle for world resources which define international politics of our time, the United *States is committed to maintaining its control over* the region which supplies much of the world's oil. And for a variety of reasons, especially Arab weakness and the influence of the Zionist lobby, it views with favour Israel's ambition to become the dominant power in the Middle East, a Sparta in the service of Rome. Hence, it not only ignores Israel's aggressions, it effectively encourages them, vetoing Security Council resolutions which censure Israeli violations of its charter. It not only condones Israel's nuclear development — an arsenal consisting of no less than 300 high density bombs — but also keeps it supplied with the latest delivery capabilities. Washington views Iran with such distaste not because Tehran favours fundamentalism or extremism — and what does Israel? — but because it appears to stand in the way of realising Israel's hegemony in the Middle East. What plans, strategies, can the OIC evolve, at this meeting *and beyond, to contain Israel, restore Palestinian and Lebanese* sovereignty and protect Arab future?

In Bosnia a full scale genocide occurred while most members of OIC watched quietly as did all European countries. To their credit some American officials protested against their government's complicity in the holocaust. Belatedly, the United States and NATO intervened to bring about another unstable and sectarian peace, dividing Bosnia along religious lines. The Dayton Accord may not hold. It certainly won't if Bosnians are not equipped to defend themselves. Does the OIC have a plan to prevent the resumption of war, or at least another genocide in the Balkans? The gathering in Islamabad will be another wasteful OIC meeting if it does no more than pass resolutions on these questions.

Why, one may ask, should the OIC take on the burdens of Palestine, Lebanon or Bosnia? But then why does this organisation exist? After all there is no grouping specifically of Christian, *Hindu, Buddhist or Pagan countries. The very existence of such* an organisation presumes a commonality of interest and collective solidarity. So it should either make good on its claims, or declare itself dissolved. We can do without another VVIP jamboree, another exercise in vacuous rhetoric, another expense and another diversion. Flowers will bloom and flags can fly anyway.



Rocks, Ross and rhetoric

For the publicity hungry Israeli premier, image is everything, whether it comes in the form of hardline policies designed to impress his extremist supporters, or proposing what could prove to be another photo-op summit — one which would not be complete without US envoy Dennis Ross. Fear not, Ross is here, along with his "peace team".

Ross, hope US officials, will patch the rifts between the Israelis and Palestinians. And Ross, hope the Israelis, will sweet talk Arafat into revoking the mass protest "green light" which, according to Netanyahu, he allegedly gave Palestinians. But, Ross, believe Palestinians, will be completely useless in successfully mediating this conflict unless he understands that this current breakdown in peace, and the ensuing tension, is a result only of Netanyahu's cavalier attitude towards honouring the foundations of peace — nothing more and nothing less.

Still, Netanyahu believes that the solution to the crisis lies in using pawns like the US envoy to undo the damage he has done, and to apply pressure on Arafat, thereby forcing the Palestinian president to stay Hamas' heavy hand and concede to a peace dictated along Israeli terms. To that end, the summit, which Netanyahu recently proposed, more likely than not will be little more than another forum in which Israeli grievances are aired, complete with a heart-wrenching tale of security woes livened up with the grizzly details of a Tel Aviv café bombing, while Palestinian concerns, as par for the course, will be ignored.

The sad irony is that this bombing, along with the entire conflict, could have been averted had Netanyahu opted to do what was right for peace rather than what is right for his polls?

One must wonder about the wisdom or logic of the steps he has taken — steps whose only objective seems to be to completely derail the peace process while providing more fodder for Israeli complaints about security. And then what?

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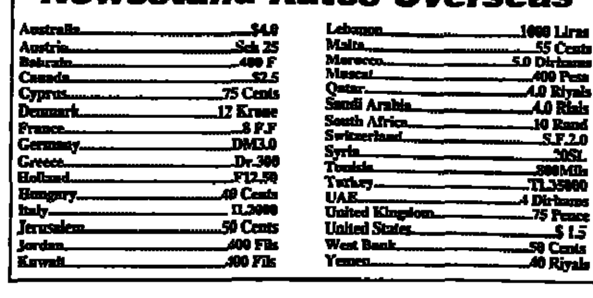
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Deluding the stones

The cloning controversy is quite incomprehensible, writes Abdel-Wahab Elmessiri in the first instalment of a two-part article. After all, one-dimensional man, the happy inhabitant of the iron cage, is eminently suited to the amoral predictability of value-free reproduction

Why the sudden alarm at photocopying human beings, especially the kind we like? Some wonder whether anything is sacred anymore. Sacred? That went out of fashion long ago, when Nietzsche declared the death of God. Why have we suddenly grown squeamish at new vistas, vast horizons, new frontiers? We have worshipped progress for so long, sent men to the moon, pushed all kinds of buttons, carried out all kinds of experiments, run in all kinds of directions without knowing why or where we were going. I once asked Oppenheimer the first thing he did after realising that he had discovered the atomic bomb. His answer was as cryptic as it was simple: "I threw up." Will our reaction to something as simple, as clear, as value-free and neutral, as scientific as cloning, be as visceral as his?

To understand, we must begin at the beginning, when humans declared themselves the centre of the universe, decided to rely completely on their mind and on science, to set up a technological utopia that would signal their mastery, not only of nature, but also of man. Within that materialistic frame of reference, everything, including man, is reduced to nature and to its natural laws. Man is therefore marginalised, for the main function of his mind now is to follow nature. Science, he has discovered, can provide him with everything: knowledge, values, happiness... This actually implies the liquidation of all "unnatural" specificities and transcendental norms, and of the initial dualism of man and nature. It leads to the primacy of the natural over the human, and the absorption of man into natural processes.

Rousseau and other simplistic enlighteners tried to seduce man into believing (without any reference to man's irreducible complexity) that the state of nature is actually a state of human bliss, a secular garden of Eden, where man can fulfill not only his natural (material) but also his spiritual and moral potential.

Hobbes and Machiavelli warned us from the outset that man in a state of nature is a wolf, a tiger, a reptile — anything but man, for man's whole being, within that frame of reference, is not determined by any human laws, but rather by ferocious natural (material) forces and drives, either immanent in his physical being (genes, instincts, libido, eros, etc.) or in the physical nature surrounding him (economic or environmental factors).

Man's intellectual, moral and emotional universe is fully explained in terms of, and reduced to, the movement of one or more material forces. In other words, man in all his complexity and rich diversity can be fully accounted for through that which is non-human, namely the general laws of nature. This gives rise to natural man, the cornerstone of the modern Western outlook. He appears in several forms, the most important of which are "economic man" and "libidinal man". The first is propelled by the profit motive and determined by the means of production; the second by Eros and the desire for immediate gratification. Television commercials have discovered that simple truth and tried to merge both men into one: libidinal-economic man, where Eros, pressed into the service of Mammon, loses its Promethean fire, and man's innate sexual desires are functionalised, transforming him into an avid consumer of nature (commodities) and human beings (sex).

To speak of morality as responsibility and autonomy within this naturalistic, materialistic frame of reference would be absurd. Natural man is completely determined: he is not the master of his own destiny, nor does he occupy the centre of the universe. The dream of materialistic modernity and secular humanism is frustrated. The heroic age is gone; we begin to witness the rise of naturalism, bureaucratisation, and the atrophy of any sense of human essence. The very concept of human nature, the idea of totality, become forms of metaphysics and obscurantism. The death of God, we discover, has actually led to the death of man, and the disappearance of human essence.

But this annihilation of man was already foreshadowed by some of the central images in Western philosophy. Spinoza compared man to a pebble, thrown by a powerful hand, which believes that its movement through space arises from the use of its own free will. Newton compared the whole world to a perfect machine, a clock that keeps on ticking endlessly and uniformly, without any divine or human intervention. The machine without was discovered within, for Locke compared the mind of man to a passive blank sheet, a *tabula rasa* that indiscriminately registers all data.

The logical extension of these lines of thought is Adam Smith's image of a world regulated by an invisible hand, and a market regulated by the mechanical laws of supply and demand. The nineteenth century saw a gradual shift from a mechanistic to an organistic world outlook, and the replacement of mechanical metaphors by their organic successors. Darwin pointed out that Rousseau's garden of Eden is a jungle that achieves harmony through the invisible hand of the struggle for survival. If Newton saw God as a clockmaker, in Darwin's world the "prologue from Heaven" is completely erased, and man traces his origins to apes and reptiles.

Freud came along and proved, scientifically and objectively according to some, that the jungle is actually within. Pavlov experimented on dogs, and applied his findings to man. Man and dog are equivalent within his system; both are completely conditioned by their surroundings. Man is thereby completely deconstructed, and the post-modernist promise that man would not worship anything, not even himself, is fulfilled. Foucault celebrated the fulfillment of this promise through an image which is neither mechanical nor organic: man is compared to shapes on the sand, washed away by the waves.

"De-deify" is just one term in a catalogue of terms that describes Western modernity. They all imply negation and loss, an absorption of human essence into the non-human. In this catalogue we can also include "depersonalize", "desanctify", "dehumanise", "demystify", "demetaphysicise", "debunk", "disenchant" and "disillusion", and of course the omnipresent and omnivorous "deconstruct". I have chosen these terms because of the suffix they share, but the dictionary of loss is full of such terminology: alienation, anomie, crises of man and meaning, neutralisation, isolation, standardisation. One should note that the terms refer not only to a loss of essence, but also to a process of flattening, of leveling all complex dimensions — the emergence of one-dimensional man.

This process has been described as neutralisation or value-free rationalisation. Weber predicted that value-free rationalisation would penetrate all aspects of life, resulting in total enthrallment with the pre-human. This process of value-free neutralisation leads to the rise of neutral average elastic men, willing to change their values at very short notice (according to one definition of modernity). These simple one-dimensional men are pragmatists and realists who have completely abandoned any hope of transcendence and adapted to the status quo, elevating it to the level of the state of nature. They live in an eternal here and now, or, rather, in an ever-elusive here and now. They have mastered the techniques of procedural rationalisation and operate in terms of instrumental reason. They are capable of performing any act: building bridges and overpasses in large cities, or concentration camps outside them, no questions asked, as long as the job is done efficiently and means are adapted to ends.

The writer is a professor emeritus at Ain Shams University.

Globalism and the MENA countries (2)

Globalism and Arab societies

In the lecture he delivered at a seminar in Paris organised by the World Bank two weeks ago, Mohamed Sid-Ahmed discussed the impact of globalism on Arab societies

It is more likely that the preponderance of globalism will make strains and stresses in Arab societies more acute than the opposite. The forces standing against globalisation today include not only the traditional conservative forces in Arab societies, but also most of those who identify with the strong revival of political Islam, and, more generally, wide sectors of the intelligentsia who perceive globalisation as adversely affecting national identity and dignity. Sovereign states can, to some extent, stand up to the onslaught of globalisation and immunise themselves against its most obviously destabilising effects. The same does not apply, however, to pan-Arabism, an ideology which encompasses a plurality of sovereign states.

The atmosphere of globalisation tends to deepen the rifts within Arab societies between the advocates of giving the Arab-Israeli conflict precedence over globalism and those who are more likely to give precedence to globalism. Giving precedence to the conflict means keeping alive the feelings of pan-Arabism, not only of nationalism. Intellectuals, civil servants and the military would tend to resist globalisation. Many in the business community, among the younger generation and within minority groups would tend, on the contrary, to sympathise with globalism and see it as a buffer against the adverse impact of social and ideological polarisation. Globalism encourages emigration and the outflow of nationals in search of jobs, either to more affluent Arab oil states or to developed countries outside the Arab world. Thus globalism can be used as ideological justification for disregarding the pull of patriotism.

It is civil servants who operate the machinery of the national state. Although they apply the instructions they are given, they are conscious that globalism infringes on state authority and violates state sovereignty. Globalism has intervened to encourage privatisation at the expense of the often exclusive authority of civil servants in many fields.

There are also social categories and strata interested in the integration of the MENA countries into the globalisation process. The most outspoken advocates of this line are leading figures in the business community. No less interested are certain minority groups which see in globalism a shelter and a refuge against growing threats at home to their identity. In accordance with the new climate of globalisation, significant sections of the business community are interested in consolidating and further boosting the trend towards privatisation which, in their eyes, entails building bridges to and entering joint ventures with Israel's business community.

Much of the younger generation can also see in globalism opportunities for upward social mobility and economic advancement. Globalism helps remove many of the inhibitions that once stood in the way of seeking job opportunities abroad, whether inside the Arab world (the Gulf region, including Iraq, Libya) or beyond. But looking for jobs is one thing, finding them is another. With widespread frustration because of critical unemployment at home, the failure to find appropriate jobs abroad can compound frustration still further. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism is related to this feeling of frustration.

In the final analysis, a common denominator to all strains and stresses within the MENA and, as a matter of fact, in many other non West-European countries around the Mediterranean as well, is what can be summed up as a confrontation with globalism led mainly by two rival political forces: the military and radical Islam. In Algeria, the military are in power and the Islamists banned and pursued as terrorists. In Turkey, the Islamists are in power, but harassed and somehow contained by the military. In Sudan, the Bechir-Turabi bipolar rule is the expression of an alliance between the military and the Islamists. In many other countries, the basic rationale of globalism versus a bipolar game of two competing forces both opposed to globalism, is less clear-cut, but present in the background.

A central dilemma now facing Arab intellectuals is whether opposing globalisation is progressive or reactionary. If history is moving towards greater globalisation, that is, greater liberalisation and privatisation, should this trend be resisted? And, if not, where does it derive its legitimacy from? So far, forces characterised as 'globalistic' are perceived by many in the Third World as an updated version of imperialism and colonialism, cloaked in a different guise better suited to the requirements of the time. Furthermore, globalisation has deepened social and class discrepancies and widened the scope of frustration and alienation. How can such developments be perceived as progressive? And if they are not, what would be the progressive alternative?

Failure to meet contemporary challenges has discredited many classical forms of outdated nationalism. But endorsing globalism as a structure imported from the North is not satisfactory either. In the North-South bipolarity which has now taken precedence over other forms of bipolarity, the parties in the south are aware that it is the values upheld by the North, not those advocated by the South, that are looked upon as emancipatory. During the Cold War, the (present) North was perceived in the Third World (the present South) as the seat of imperialism and colonialism, while national liberation by all available means, including military struggle, was regarded as laudable. Today, the rationale is reversed. The values championed by the North, notably, democracy, human rights and a market economy (which stands at the very root of a *global* market economy and, consequently, of globalism) are today not challenged anywhere in the world, while many parties in the South are seen as violating these values and resorting to violence and terrorism. What is certain is that if enthusiasm fed the national liberation struggle a few decades ago, it is now frustration and bitterness at the results of that struggle and disappointment in the performance of the independent national State that occupies the forefront of the political debate in the South. Needless to say, frustration is not a progressive value.

Actually, there seems to be a critical threshold beyond which it is possible for a society to move forward at an ever increasing pace (eg the Asian Tiers), and below which a society is condemned to remain a prisoner of its past. This applies to many MENA countries. The diminution of distances between communities does not necessarily make them feel closer. Sometimes the opposite holds true, and, if one community is perceived by another as encroaching on its patrimony, it is cast by the latter as an aggressor. This is true for the countries surrounding Israel. Thus the shrinking of the planet can actually deepen disparities instead of eliminating them.

Why the Asian Tigers made their breakthrough into the future while most MENA countries remain captives of their past is a question of cardinal importance. Is it because *rentier* oil wealth has been more of a liability for the Arabs than an asset, in the sense that it justified not making genuine productive efforts and led to the squandering of oil revenues and widespread corruption throughout the Arab world, while the Asian countries with success stories had no cushion of easy money to fall back on? Globalism, by definition, is not against speculation and 'parasitical' capital. But owners of capital which is primarily non-productive and 'parasitical' can have neither clout nor the ability to dominate markets and shape economic tends, even in a globalist climate.

A crushing blow

By Naguib Mahfouz

America's use of the veto for the second time to block a Security Council resolution requiring Israel to cease building settlements in east Jerusalem came as quite a blow. The United States using the veto is nothing new: for the past 20-odd years America has used the veto almost exclusively in Middle Eastern affairs. We are therefore quite used to the American veto when Israel is concerned.

The reason I was disappointed this time was that, when Washington vetoed a resolution blaming Israel for allowing settlers to build on disputed ground, the US president clearly stated that the veto did not mean American approval for the construction of the settlement. As a result, the projected resolution was altered to exclude any mention of censure or blame, and the watered-down version merely requested that construction of the settlement be halted. In other words, the resolution was actually a repetition of the American president's words. Nevertheless, Washington employed the veto for the second time and blocked the second resolution also.

I consider this veto to be the most critical of all the American vetoes to date, since it undermines all America's credibility as an honest broker, which it pretends to be, destroys the last vestiges of the Arabs' faith in its impartiality, and shows decisively that Israel can do anything at all, even if it flaunts laws and agreements, while the US continues to watch the Arabs with an eagle eye. The comparison of the treatment of Iraq and Libya, on one hand, with that of Israel, on the other, is sufficient to arouse more than disappointment and frustration.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Explosive anger

Al-Ahram: "The main reason for the recent acts of violence is the way Netanyahu dealt with the sensitive Jerusalem issue and his failure to understand the meaning behind deferring negotiations on Jerusalem until the final phase of the peace process. It is only after all the accords have been signed, the meaning of peace made clear, and intentions defined that the Jerusalem issue can be tackled and a reasonable compromise reached. Without all this any attempt to change the status of Jerusalem will be a fuse which will ignite fires in the Arab and Islamic region."
(Ibrahim Nafie, 23 March)

Al-Ahali: "Rudeness and insolence cannot alter facts and the one fact that the ruling Israeli clique is aware of is Arafat's popularity amongst his people. One other fact is that Arafat might not be able to restrain the anger of the Palestinian people if settlement continues in Arab Jerusalem. And if Arafat leaves Palestinian lands once again, a revolution will break out and the Intifada will come into its own once again."
(Amina El-Naqash, 19 March)

Rose El-Youssef: "They said that Suleiman Khater was mad and that the Jordanian who killed Israeli tourists was also mad. And those who carried out suicide attacks were described as terrorists. Madness and terrorism are inappropriate words to use. It is a natural outcome of another type of madness and another type of terrorism. What happened on Friday in Tel Aviv was the answer to the bulldozers building the new Jewish settlement on Abu Ghneim without paying heed to Arab protests or any other pressures."
(Editorial, 24 March)

Al-Arabi: "If Arafat would look back on his life of struggle and what it has reached today, perhaps it would be best if he were to tender his resignation. And it should be a bona fide resignation and not make-believe like Abu Mazen's recent resignation. His resignation would put the present situation in its true context: a brazen occupation and a true resistance. Not only will it be his end but also that of Netanyahu and all who benefit from this tattered agreement which is scorned even by those who signed it. It is to be hoped that Arafat will take the best decision of his life and retire ... and leave it to the Palestinians to make a free choice — to direct their stones, bullets and explosive-packed vehicles at everything Israeli!"
(Emadeddin Hussein, 24 March)

Al-Wafd: "Israel is mistaken if it believes that its violent reaction to the Tel Aviv bombing operation will stop Palestinian operations. Violence begets violence. Israel was the instigator and Palestinian operations are only a reaction to Israeli violence. So even if Israel hits back with extreme violence, does it really expect the Palestinians, including stone-throwing children, to put down their weapons and surrender?"
(Editorial, 23 March)

Al-Akhbar: "The world has now come to realise that Israeli Premier Netanyahu and his extremist colleagues are responsible for the tension, violence and bloody confrontations in the occupied territories. Their decision to go ahead with the settlement in East Jerusalem has unleashed a wave of anger among the Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims, paving the way for acts of violence in self-defence and to defend honour. They alone are responsible for the Tel Aviv suicide attack and any condemnation should be directed at them in the first place. They are the true perpetrators by pouring fuel on the fire raging in the hearts of the Palestinians and Arabs who suffer from having their lands and rights usurped by Israel under the protection of the US veto."
(Galal Dwidar, 23 March)

Al-Shaab: "The Abu Ghneim settlement is a brazen step to decide the Jerusalem issue and the Zionist-US alliance behind it thinks that we will only respond with statements of condemnation and rejection which will soon die down. I cannot understand how stupid they are to think that they can get their own way and live peaceably amongst us!"
(Adel Hussein, 21 March)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**

In trying to capture the likeness of Morocco's King Hassan II, who tomorrow will host a meeting of the Jerusalem Committee of which he is chairman, I emphasised the regularity of features in the rounded face. Thick eyebrows, a broad forehead, symmetrical lips, the wrinkles that have come with the passing of time, these are the elements on which I have drawn.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Arab cards to play

The Arabs have used every possible peaceful diplomatic ploy in their efforts to get the peace process back on the track agreed upon in Madrid — in other words, to achieve the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 and 425 and to realise the principle of land for peace.

Since the arrival to power of the Netanyahu government and Clinton's re-election, the Palestinians have left no stone unturned, knocked on the White House door, made all the possible rounds, visited Madeleine Albright and her deputy, Dennis Ross, to try and convince Netanyahu and his right-wing coalition that the Arabs want peace, and the resumption of negotiations. The only conditions are that Netanyahu respect the promises and agreements already concluded, and that America use its influence and urge Netanyahu to cease his repeated violations and procrastination.

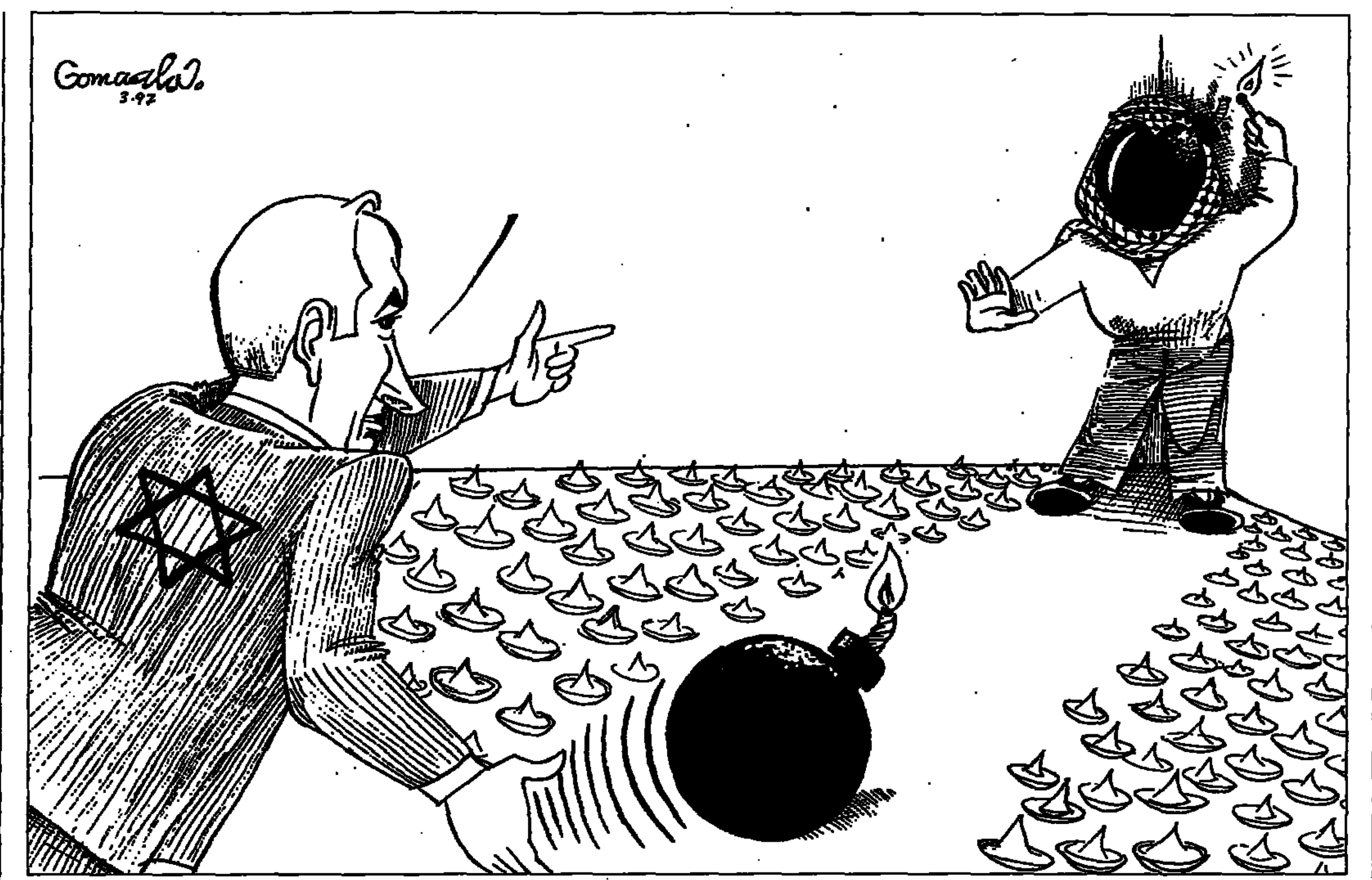
The Syrians have tried everything to convince the world, including Washington and Tel Aviv, that Syria wishes to resume negotiations and finalise the discussions where they left off with Rabin and Peres, and in which they had reached an understanding on the general lines of an agreement on the Golan Heights.

In all the crises brought on by Israeli violations — whether the hospital for handicapped Palestinian children closed last year, the tunnel dug under Al-Aqsa Mosque, foot-dragging over the Hebron agreement, the expansion of Israeli settlements or the construction of the Har Homa settlement in Jerusalem — the Arabs never broke off discussions or suspended negotiations, nor did they ever threaten to do so. Instead, they resorted to the least threatening gestures possible, as though they were not in the right. They complained and pleaded with the US administration, which is often afflicted temporarily with deafness, searched for the former European ally, and finally appealed to the Security Council and the General Assembly. These gestures were repeated time after time, crisis after crisis, although any decisions taken were inevitably annulled by the US veto. Perhaps the test of patience, faith, and belief in peace must go on indefinitely, or at least until any of the following occur: a moment of divine intervention, Netanyahu's death or that of the Arab states, or the collapse of the United States as a world power.

Many believe that the Arabs' failure is due to the fact that the cards they hold are useless or have already been shown, so that Netanyahu is free to act as he wishes — resume negotiations or stop them, implement agreements or employ Israeli "justice", allow Arafat to remain in Gaza or exile him as threatened by the Israeli Minister of Justice — in short, to accord the Palestinians permission to live or to die, as he deems fit. Arafat, on the other hand, must bear the responsibility of muzzling the Palestinian people and stifling their resentment and fury.

Nevertheless, the Arabs do have a number of winning cards which they have been reluctant to use, either because of divisions or for lack of will power. These cards are more effective than Islamic conferences. It would be enough, for example, for Arafat to announce his resignation and place Netanyahu and America in a very awkward position: either drop the sham and reoccupy Gaza and the West Bank towns, killing many and losing their political standing; or revise their whole way of thinking. In my opinion, the present situation in Gaza and the West Bank is far worse than total Israeli occupation.

It would also be enough for the Arabs to stop buying billions of dollars worth of arms from America and the West, arms we all know only serve the economies of the West, which support Israel completely. These same weapons provide the Arabs with only symbolic defence value. As we can see, the Arabs have valid cards in their hands which could enable them to seize their rights. The important point is: do they have the political will to use them?



Soapbox

Dead again

Netanyahu's election and his government's programme were the first sign that the Oslo Accord was in danger. In his programme, Netanyahu undermined the very basis of the agreement by endorsing the expansion of settlements and other colonisation policies. He said: "We are against Oslo; it was imposed on us, and we shall try to change it." When David Levy was appointed foreign minister, he said: "If anybody doubts that we shall betray our programme, he is dreaming and living in an illusion." This sums up the Israeli government's stand.

The most recent developments, in fact, starting with the settlement on Abu Ghneim — which was never part of Jerusalem, but was occupied with other parts of Palestine in 1967 — are violations of international law and the Geneva Convention.

The settlement and other policies which change the outcome of final status negotiations are clear contraventions of the principles both parties should respect, since the Oslo Accords clearly stated that each party should refrain from creating facts on the ground which undermine the outcome of the final negotiations.



Netanyahu's previous decisions and statements killed Oslo, but he hammered in the last nail with his new initiative, which is really Oslo's death certificate. As the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee chairman, Uzi Landau, said enthusiastically when welcoming the prime minister's latest initiative, it is "an admission that the Oslo process is dead."

This week's soapbox speaker is the Palestinian minister of agriculture and a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Abdel-Jawad Saleh

Netanyahu's final solution

An escalating spiral of violence is the most likely outcome of Israeli policy, writes **Gamil Matar**. Continued violations of Palestinian rights will only spark new fires; yet the victims are being blamed for their own tragedy

Events of the past two weeks in Israel and the Occupied Territories offer substantial material for a case study on terrorism. These events have lent weight to the argument of those who hold that terrorism cannot be discussed, studied or combated in isolation of the circumstances that surround it and give it impetus.

Over the past two weeks my thoughts have been dominated by the accusation leveled by Leah Rabin, the late Israeli prime minister's widow, against Binyamin Netanyahu, who at the time was the head of the opposition Likud front. She held the vicious campaign and accusations of treachery waged by Netanyahu and the Likud against the Labour Party, and Rabin personally, to be responsible for Rabin's death, even before he was assassinated by Yigal Amir. During the investigation and trial, Amir never wavered from his conviction that he had done the right thing; if given the chance to do it over again, he was sure he would not hesitate. According to many commentaries in the Western and Israeli press, the assassin would never have continued to believe in his right to commit such an act were it not for the fact that Netanyahu, the Likud leadership, his religious extremist mentors and the leaders of the settlement communities had transformed him into an instrument of murder.

The press commentaries could have wounded Netanyahu and the Likud as a whole, had Netanyahu not belonged to that school of Zionism that knows no compunction and is incapable of recognising any hint of terrorism in Zionist activity. Israeli society does not perceive Menachem Begin, Yitzhaq Shamir or other leaders of the Zionist terror gangs of the 1940s as terrorists; nor does it view the expulsion of Palestinians from their land, the destruction of their homes, or the razing of their camps as terrorist acts.

Netanyahu has now become prime minister. I do not believe I am advancing a conspiracy theory, although some readers may accuse me of doing so, when I suggest that Netanyahu is moving with extreme cunning and iron determination in order to accomplish a specific, although undeclared, aim. He knew, as the entire world knew, that to go ahead with the settlement plans at Abu Ghneim would provoke Palestinian anger. He knew as well as anyone that he would make the Palestinians angry; he was aware that among them, there would be extremists and perhaps even some who could be correctly described as terrorists; that among those terrorists, there would be some who refuse to obey Arafat's instructions; and that one of these terrorists would be so incensed by the bulldozers moving on Abu Ghneim that he would undertake a terrorist attack.

President Mubarak warned of the risks entailed by going ahead with the settlement project. The American government repeatedly called for restraint. Its calls were not aimed at Netanyahu, the actual instigator. Rather, they appealed to the individual who, as the US administration — and everyone else — predicted, would be driven to commit a suicide operation.

Since this result was so predictable, Netanyahu's statements and communiqués, in which he accused the Palestinian president and his government of giving the green light to violence, are grossly out of place. Mohamed Abdel-Qader Abu Dia, who blew himself apart in a Tel Aviv café, was given the go-ahead by Netanyahu, in full view of Cairo, Washington and the entire world: the approval of the construction of a new settlement in south-eastern Jerusalem.

When, exactly, did he receive permission? This may have occurred when he heard Netanyahu's repeated affirmations, in Israel and during his visits to the US and Cairo, that he intended to go ahead with the settlement. Perhaps he received his order when Netanyahu violated the basic rules of hospitality during King Hussein's condolence visit to the families of the Israeli students, and, taking advantage of the atmosphere of grief and anger, insisted once again that work on the settlement would continue on schedule. Nor should we minimise the significance of Netanyahu's announcement that he held Yasser Arafat personally responsible for any violent incidents.

It is impossible to believe that a leader who really felt responsible for the lives of his fellow citizens would have acted as Netanyahu has done since he assumed the leadership of the Likud, and particularly during the last three weeks. From the moment he announced his party's platform, it was clear that he was intent upon stalling the peace process, if not stopping it entirely. This was not because it granted the Arabs some of their rights. Rather, he was certain that the costs of open warfare would be too difficult to sustain locally and internationally, because the most likely result of armed conflict between the Arabs and Israelis would be an inexorable wave of religious and sectarian uprising throughout the entire region, that would sweep away with it many of the foundations of US and Western interests. Netanyahu therefore settled on the closest thing to organised warfare: continual goading of the Arabs, and the Palestinians in particular. This form of provocation, he decided, would achieve the same objectives that could have been won through open warfare.

Netanyahu has succeeded in achieving his main goals: he has catapulted Israeli society, along with all the other societies of the region, into a climate of violence. Under the Labour government, there had emerged a general feeling among Israelis that peace, at least the peace Peres had conceived and begun to implement, did not conflict with their dreams of expansion, domination and security. Many Arabs began to be lured by the form of peace Peres advocated. Netanyahu, who was in the opposition at the time, objected that Peres's peace drive jeopardised the dreams of Israeli society, which could only be realised through the Likud formula. The difference between the two Israeli leaders in this regard was that, while Peres retained the right to resort to violence as a deterrent and sometimes as a form of brutal collective punishment as was manifested in Qana, Netanyahu brought violence back to the fore as the basis for Israel's dealings with the Arabs.

Under Peres, the expansion of Israeli settlements took place with a furtiveness that was sometimes abetted by Arab countries and the PA. The blatant belligerence with which Netanyahu pursued his settlement policies was designed to generate a climate of violence. His arrogance and contempt for the Arabs is calculated to offend and, as such, is another form of violence. He has repeatedly expressed his disregard for international solutions, the Madrid conference and the Oslo Accords. He used the negotiations over Hebron as a forum to alienate the Palestinian negotiators and inspire hatred among the inhabitants of Hebron, who were forced to accept an agreement that tore their society apart and restricted their freedom within their city, all for the sake of 400 settlers imported for this purpose from Brooklyn.

Netanyahu has also instilled in the Arabs the notion that he is a liar, a man who will not fulfil his promises and who will break any pledges he has made. This was intentional. The purpose was to breed hatred and violence. The presence of violence is essential in order to support his contention that there can be no peace without security, by which he means, of course, the security of every Israeli citizen who lives in the 'sea of Arab anger, violence and terrorism. If the international community does not take action to declare Netanyahu's belligerent behaviour a form of terrorism, the acts of anger which that same community describes as "terrorist" will never stop.

Unfortunately, I do not hold great hope that the international community will act. The US is not about to do anything that would tangibly alter the situation, particularly now that Clinton has become prey to domestic developments which have weakened the ability of his administration to exert pressure on Israel. But even if, somehow, the international community was able to pressure Israel to stop altering the situation on the ground and to reach a just settlement that upholds the rights of the Arabs and implements international resolutions, I would expect Netanyahu to pursue one of two alternatives.

The first would be to persist in escalating the climate of violence and hatred in Israel and the surrounding region in order to grind the peace process to a halt. This would compel him to call for new parliamentary elections and, as customarily occurs during election periods which last seven to eight months, the peace process will remain stalled and outside pressures will be temporarily called off. Then, whether Labour or Likud forms the majority in the Knesset, Netanyahu will still be prime minister. If Netanyahu ends up heading a Labour government, the peace process will necessarily come to a halt as no progress will be made in implementing the agreements Israel signed with the Palestinians and is supposed to sign with the Lebanese and the Syrians. In this case, all the measures intended to impose a new de facto reality — the construction of new settlements, the expropriation of land and the expulsion and blockade of Palestinians — will continue unabated.

The second alternative is the continuation of current policy. Netanyahu is fully aware that no government in the region or in the West has the courage to stop the peace process. In other words, the peace process may continue in the same manner, with the perpetual provocation of the Palestinians through continued settlement activity and intensive efforts to divide the Arabs in an escalating climate of terrorism, instigated by the Israelis.

Netanyahu is bent on setting off a new conflagration in the Middle East. He personally lit the fuse when he so fuelled the anger of an Israeli youth that the young man was driven to assassinate Rabin. He has continued to instill hatred in Arab and Israeli hearts alike; the most recent victims of his policies have already offered tragic testimony to the consequences.

The writer is the director of the Arab Centre for Development and Futuristic Research.

To The Editor

Blaming music

Sir- Although I don't agree totally with Hani Shukrallah's analysis ("Reflections", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, issues 312 and 313) of the killings in Abu Qurqas, I thoroughly endorse his incisive indictment of the current hypocrisy and crisis of ideology. His questioning of official and unofficial religious discourse is provocative and legitimate.

Regarding the role of music in the satanic cults we would all do well to consult our scriptures in this regard. Strong derision of music is found in Islamic *Hadith Sahih* (verified) as well as in the Old Testament and during hundreds of years of Christianity. Up to the present day indeed, observant Christians, Jews and Muslims avoid music to varying degrees.

Could this long-standing fear and loathing be merely superstition, or shall we all be termed "fundamentalist terrorists"?

I welcome a lively discourse on this timely subject.

Umm Salahadin
Digla, Maadi

Holy City

Sir- I write to you because of the Israeli measures in Jerusalem — confiscating lands and going ahead with settlement construction. In spite of these measures, the Arabs are still waiting for the issue of the Holy City to be handled in the last stage of negotiations.

The Arabs must take more concrete action to save Jerusalem. They must not wait till the fate of the Holy City is determined by the hard-liner, Netanyahu. It was clear from his last visit to the US that the Clinton administration has started to adapt its stance to Netanyahu's position. Therefore, the Arabs must depend on their own energies.

The economic element is the Arabs' most influential factor in shaping the future not only of Jerusalem, but also of the whole region. Through economic pressures, the Arabs can make Israel submit to their rights.

Saad Mahmoud Hamed
Faculty of Arts
Menoufia University

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah — Beyond peace processing

The sense of déjà vu is overwhelming: yet another Israeli outrage against Palestinian rights. Israel's leaders, their familiar discourse articulating an arrogance of power steeped in absolute military superiority, barefaced lies and Zionist/religious mythology, set the rules of the game. Arabs rant and rage and warn of dire consequences. The Western media is critical, but few within that estimable profession seem to find it in their hearts to challenge Netanyahu's lies, or expose the farcical absurdity of his lectures on 'organic' urban growth — Bibi's biology is as crude as his political science; when 'tissue' spreads in an invasive manner, this is not 'vitality' but cancer.

'World public opinion', and its makers, are upset with Israel not so much for committing an act of blatant colonial plunder, one that can be justified only by shameless racism, but because it has 'prejudiced' the peace process. Palestinian and Arab leaders, long-time prisoners of the peace process discourse, play their part in trivialising the issue; an outrage against fundamental rights and morality is transformed into a technicality, a matter of interpreting Oslo's deliberately vague and loose stipulations.

Appeals are made to the UN. World public opinion censures Israel. Israel sticks its tongue out at world public opinion and the US slams a couple more vetoes. The peace process has come up against yet another 'deadlock', 'impasse', etc. — headline writers scour their thesauruses for an appropriate noun they haven't used a hundred times before. Meanwhile, everyone waits on Hamas' pleasure. Netanyahu, the artless Americanised fascist that he is, all but openly wills a suicide bombing — subtlety he hasn't got. The Palestinian leadership, rather than adopt and advocate a response of its own, pathetically waves the Hamas card.

In an all too familiar lament, it beseeches the Israeli leaders, the American leaders, the Europeans, the UN, world public opinion, anybody who will listen: "Don't undermine us, we are moderate, abject realists, committed to the peace process and the Oslo deal, which at most gives us a dandified bantustan — an airport of our own from which our president can fly without having to pass through an Israeli security check. We have sworn our renunciation of violence till we are blue in the face, and are committed to joining hands in a common battle against the enemies of peace. Even as you gobble up our land, starve our people, strangle our cities and villages, make a mockery of our future statehood, openly declare that all we can look forward to are a few cantons and your benevolence, we will not even suspend the negotiations, we may bellow and screech and appeal to the world and the UN, but, on the ground, we call on our people to exercise restraint. Be warned, however. If you humiliate us too much, the extremists, the enemies of peace, the suicide bombers will take over."

Everyone waits for Hamas, and Hamas, out of stupidity, demagogy or political cynicism, and most likely a combination of all three, delivers. The suicide bomber, the ultimate pawn in virtually everybody's political game but his own, blows himself up, and kills and injures Israeli civilians, invariably including children. A vicious and immoral act, the inhumanity of the café bombing is equalled only by its utter futility. Hamas, which in its previous suicide bombings a little over a year ago seemed bent on wrecking the Oslo process, now, absurdly, appears to be using the same kind of immoral tactics to save it. In both cases, the Islamist group's apparent objectives were in stark contrast to its methods, and had nothing whatsoever to do with developing the Palestinian struggle.

Netanyahu revelled in the realisation of his prophecy, suspending all talks and sealing the Palestinian territories. Meanwhile, the Palestinian leadership rushed to issue condemnations and apologies, rounding up Hamas suspects. Israel, as usual, found the PA's anti-Hamas measures insufficient, and Arafat found himself in the familiar and unenviable position of either acting as Israel's gendarme — and, this time around, not even on behalf of Rabin or Peres, but of Netanyahu — or incurring Israel's wrath

And Israeli wrath knows no bounds. Under Labour or Likud, Rabin, Peres or Netanyahu, Palestinians and Arabs are held hostage to Israeli 'security'. Under full sight of 'world public opinion', and backed enthusiastically by the US and its media, Israel has won for itself the right to exercise collective punishment in ways unparalleled since the Nazis. Whole populations may be bombed, homes razed to the ground, hundreds killed and hundreds of thousands pushed to starvation, as Israel's leaders and generals launch their highly organised rampages to avenge 'Jewish blood'.

It is all, of course, sordidly familiar, with one important difference. Endings are upon us. Oslo, even as it seems to flounder yet again, is coming to its logical conclusion. Netanyahu's 'proposal' to the Palestinians to scrap the rest of the interim stage, with its undefined multi-stage redeployments, and head directly to final status negotiations, merely underlines what an unbiased reading of Oslo, not merely as text, but more importantly as a process, could have been discerned from day one: that redeployments are all there is; the interim agreement is the final settlement; a bantustan is all the current peace process was ever going to give us.

It is all the more pathetic, then, that the one card the Palestinian leadership seems to hold is its impotence; that all it can bank on to sway Netanyahu, win Clinton's backing, or force a Labour-Likud coalition government (though why this should be any better than the current government is anybody's guess) is its inability to provide proper leadership and guidance to the Palestinian people — in other words, the spectre of Hamas and Jihad and their suicide bombers.

A little over a year ago, in the wake of the Jerusalem/Tel Aviv suicide bombings, I argued that the one way to preclude the debasement of the Palestinian struggle into a bloody and futile 'war of civilisations', in which only Israel and its American allies can win, is for the Palestinians, with their inexhaustible reservoirs of courage and determination, to evolve a strategy that provides a genuine alternative both to capitulationism and to ultimately futile and morally reprehensible exclusivism.

The Oslo process has all but reached its final destination. No surprises, or at least no pleasant surprises, are in store. Our only hope is to move beyond it.

Bodies everywhere

Sometimes its worth it, writes **David Blake**

Romeo and Juliet; Cairo Opera Ballet Company; Cairo Opera Orchestra; conductor, Ivan Filev; director, Abdel-Moneim Kamel; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall; 21 March

Romeo and Juliet fits. It seems to belong to the ages. The story is so easy that every part of it, even the poison taking of the two principals, could easily be happening next door, regardless of whether your neighbours inhabit a house or palace. Boys in Bab El-Louk do much the same as those in this ballet. The male-bonding dream began in Greece, flooded over into the Renaissance and ended up everywhere, via Hollywood.

The boys fly through the air, land and embrace. There is a moment in which their rapport hangs in the air, and then, in the ballet at least, the killing begins. *Romeo* is like that. There is never anything halfway about it.

Romeo and Juliet long ago left the merely spoken theatre. It is an opera, many versions long. It is a cinematic sub-genre. Cairo Opera Ballet Company's Shakespeare based version is Cranko-Macmillan with changes by Abdel-Moneim Kamel who, with his long association with this creation from its early days — he performed in Milan, Berlin and New York — knows it like the back of his hand. His changes, though, are minimal, and seem to be aimed at relieving the dancer playing Romeo of some of the most burdensome aspects of the role.

This ballet is the Cairo Opera's best single offering, in any form, since its opening. It never falls below the highest level of excellence. There is not a flaw, not an over pretty colour, not the slightest mistake in the dancing. These people on stage are people of a city, of Florence: they act and react, gossip and fight, just like real people. Their roles are so real to them that they appear to forget that they are in a ballet.

The social levels are drawn exactly. There is an air of stupendous village pomposity about the elders. There is, too, renaissance energy and a throwaway elegance. All the dancers come from the Cairo Opera Company. There are, of course, cast changes. On the night of the 21st Romeo was danced by Canstantin Griniok, Juliet by Alexandra Volkhvskata and Mercutio by Alexander Griniok. But it may be difficult to pick the cast you want.

Juliet of the 21st was fine — tall, pale and with enough dramatic instincts to handle the climaxes. Romeo — Canstantin Griniok — managed the lifts, and acts Romeo in a straightforward manner. Later he may suggest the more rebellious character that suits an active Juliet, lifting the two roles onto a higher level. For in the end Romeo and Juliet are not doves of love but young eagles, heirs to a violent and destructive civilisation.

Though the two principals hardly lacked grandeur, the grandest aspect of this ballet belongs to Prokofiev's music. It is almost his masterpiece. And it is totally Prokofiev: the tunes come apt and brief, flooded with emotion, lust, poison and the eventual closing in of the endless power game of what is constructed and demolished.

The story is never going to end in the light. The bright chatter about there always being a tomorrow does not fit this tale anymore than Macbeth. It lives by its grandeur, its sense of hectic, doomed beauty. And because it is so powerful, the story flourishes.

Kamel never forgets that it is the music that calls the tune in ballet, more so, perhaps, than in opera. And Prokofiev's music is *Romeo* for our time. Under Ivan Filev the newly formed Cairo Opera Orchestra does its best. Unfortunately it sounded under-sized. It was not quite rich enough, and there was no blaze.

The work, though, is out there, in the theatre, where it belongs. It is a joy to have it.

Masters of the 20th Century II; Cairo Symphony Orchestra with Mohamed Hamdy, clarinet, Salma Sadek, violin; conductor, Mustafa Nagui; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall; 22 March


Salma Sadek

Hush — here comes Mustafa Nagui. The tread is unmistakable. The first piece of the concert was a fugue for orchestra by G Salama. It was elaborate, heavily composed and loud. We were in for some choppy water. There was not much oriental feeling, or even classic European. It seemed to come from nowhere in particular, yet lacked originality. Some of the Cairo Symphony Orchestra's openings are exciting, and one waits for more. But with this Fugue came the question, could there be more where this came from?

With the next piece — Dvojak's Concerto in A Minor for Violin and Orchestra op 53 — there was no question about where we were. It has a rather precarious place in the international repertory. It has a name, school and parentage, but little else to support it. It lacks the big, sweeping tunes Dvojak always finds for his symphonies and operas. Its appeal — which is there — is never more than trite. Nor is it easy to play. For reasons known only to the composer he seemed to lack any interest in the instrument or its display. It never stops moving, though in the process offers nothing remotely breathtaking.

Why was it chosen for Salma Sadek? She is young, ambitious and possessed of extraordinary musical gifts that will take her far. What went wrong? What was it Mustafa Nagui did not like — the music itself, the Cairo Symphony Orchestra or Salma Sadek?

In the first section of the three movements Dvojak puts his player in the midst of a chattering of violins from the orchestra. It is embarrassing, an embarrassment that continued again and again, for as Sadek pressed into the noise she was immediately overwhelmed by the busy strings around her. She gave generously of her tone, which can be broad and brazen, but to no effect. Always she was sat upon, if not by the strings then by the brass. This is just not on in a violin concerto. The piece wove along like something from a discount factory warehouse. Yards of mass produced material without colour or change. This performance went very close to the areas in public music making were certain things are not really done. Sadek did her best but the orchestra, under Mustafa Nagui, were elsewhere.

After this misalliance of what should have been we had the party, a Rossini jewel box of soprano assoluta diva for clarinet and orchestra with Mohamed Hamdy centre stage. He carried it off in the best Neapolitan manner. Trills, runs, cantilevered high notes, and this time a conductor doing his best not to get in the way. Hamdy did the star thing in the *primo uomo* manner, and no one was slapped. From this amazing aerial about turn we where, after an intermission, swept into the last tango in Moscow Ballroom for Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony.

It was composed in 1943 but time and history have made such sweeps and swipes at events that it is hard to remember what was going on at the time.

But all was not well in the Moscow Ballroom or anywhere else for that matter: 1943 stank of death, and every other kind of evil.

Shostakovich began as one of the greats of the century. Like Prokofiev he fell out with the Kremlin team. But whereas Prokofiev seems to have survived, Shostakovich seems not.

The Eighth Symphony appears like a monster from another age, an age when its composer was being pressured to tow the line. It begins with strange, picky, ill defined sounds, devoid of content or contact. And then enormous noise, as Nagui is loosed on excess. Big, bigger, biggest: Nagui stands his ground. There are other things, other openings on music of the twentieth century besides Shostakovich. Everything in this music gets leaner. We stare only at ice, or the spectacle of death, or darkness.

It was brave to present this music for in the end it leaves nothing. A few stains were once stood people. And finally it collapses into a poisonous miasma. This concert was done.

Art

Conversation pieces

Nigel Ryan finds that Gathering, the group show including works by 15 artists at Cairo Atelier, has its moments

Gathering, the title of a group show sponsored by Pro Helvetia, will occupy the two main galleries of the Cairo Atelier until the end of the month. It includes work by some 15 artists, in a variety of media. There are watercolours by Adly Rizkallah, graphics by Ahmed El-Labbad, paintings by Ahmed Kadour, Assem Sharaf, Dina El-Gharib, Huda Lutfi, Ibrahim El-Haddad, Omar El-Fayoumi and Sherif Abdel-Badie, jewellery by Suzanne El-Masri and Zeinab Khalifa, sculpture by Barbara Graf and Hazem El-Mestikawy, collages by William Lyster and ceramics by Evelyn and Michel Pastore.

It is inevitable in such a collective exhibition that there should be differences in both the quality of works on display and in the ambitions of the various artists. Some are familiar names on the gallery circuit while others are relative newcomers. Some, too, have already exhibited together: Sherif Abdel-Badie, Omar El-Fayoumi and Assem Sharaf were included in the exhibition of miniatures shown at Espace last season. It was exhibition that could well have incorporated many of the works currently on show at the Atelier where several exhibitors seem to have downsized in the belief that small is beautiful.

Among the more interesting pieces were the graphic works of Ahmed El-Labbad, postcard people — one bearing an uncanny resemblance to Queen Elizabeth II — complete with stamps as if to underline the point, framed by blunt nosed but nonetheless friendly looking zephyrs. Mock-serious, El-Labbad appears to have set out to raise a smile, and he succeeds.

Adly Rizkallah, who has also chosen small scale works for the show, exhibits pretty watercolours, residual figure studies, three of which boast pyramids in the backdrop. There is little, really, to be said about them, beyond being easy on the eye and undemanding.

Dina El-Gharib, whose works count among the smallest in the show, packs a great deal into a tiny space, creating some visual puns that seem, once again, to be intended to raise a smile. Scraps of text, the tiniest tearings from magazines, are used alongside pieces of fabric and ink to create the illusion of a television screen that incorporates words that cannot be read within a framed image that, without knowing the frames before and those after, can signify nothing. A frozen moment from an unknown narrative, and a neat commentary on the assumed efficacy of television as a medium for communication. When she is not making such puns, though, there is something a little disturbing about the images Dina El-Gharib produces, not least the figure constructed from smudges of ink with barbed wire legs and hair.

Gathering includes some accomplished painting, though the trend towards miniaturisation seems somehow to have set things a little askew. Omar El-Fayoumi has, over the years, produced many scenes of Cairo streets though seldom have they been as inside-out as the ones currently showing. While detailing remains consistent — a dedicated stroller of the city's streets could probably identify the cafés at which these pinched-faced characters sit — there are some odd intrusions. Something is wrong, and that something seems to focus on the meticulously drawn alarm clock that in one painting sits on a table in a street café, pretending, for all the world, that it is on the mantel. It is in such strange juxtapositions, and in the expressions on the face of the characters, that the strength of these paintings lie. You can leave the gallery, but the sense of something being not quite right will remain.

Assem Sharaf has always dealt in things not being quite what they seem. His figure studies, groups of strange, amorphous, half human creatures, inhabit some primordial hinterland of the imagination. If they cling to one another, they do so not in affection but simply to survive. Sharaf has always produced paintings capable of sending a slight shudder down the spine. Any vestige of comfort is dispensed with, anything remotely sentimental eradicated, and the result is something raw, paintings that are incredibly uncomfortable because they so precisely pick away at the nerves.

Among the largest pieces in the show are three collages by William Lyster, who takes bits of paper and bits of glue, then thinks of clever things to do. Apart from the Book of the Dead pinball machine, more a literary than visual conceit, the effect is very like a flattened pop up book with colourful characters wandering across maps of Cairo. The visual equivalent to crossword puzzles, these collages provide at least a Sunday morning's worth of punning apocrypha.

Even when there is a degree of painterly ambition present, as in the medium sized abstracts by Ibrahim El-Haddad, the artist appears intent on undermining his own grandiloquence. El-Haddad's paintings seem to begin as seriously loaded gestures, and really are very cleverly constructed. But then comes the overlay in pastels, the outlining of shapes in charcoal, which serve only to pull the metaphysical carpet from beneath the artist's feet. It is not just self-consciousness, but a kind of deliberate anti-heroism that is at once refreshing and moving.

Among the other artists represented, Huda Lutfi shows pieces similar to those exhibited earlier in the month at AUC, Hazem El-Mestikawy exhibits pastiches of African masks, while Ahmed Kadour shows a kind of minimal, but nonetheless accomplished triptych, alongside two mythically inclined studies of rams.

Perhaps it is unavoidable, in such a show, to wonder quite what the criteria that governed the selection of participating artists might be. The galleries at the Cairo Atelier are, after all, small spaces, and while the hanging of several artists together in such a space might serve to afford the spectator some kind of overview of contemporary production, that would demand a curatorial eye and a more sensitive line being drawn between the good and not so good. The current show appears to no more than arbitrary, and while that has its amusing moments, they are no more than accidents.

Gleaned from a Gathering

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Peggy Crawford (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5422. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 27 March.
Studies of traditional Yemeni architecture.

Ezzeddin Naguib
Centre for International Cultural Cooperation, 11 Shagaret El-Dorr St, Zamalek. Tel 341 5419. Daily 10am-3pm & 4pm-9pm. Until 28 March.
Paintings exhibited under the title Revelations of A Tree.

Three Contemporary Visions
Khan El-Maghraby, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4pm-8.30pm. Until 29 March.
Works by Sabri Mansour, Said Hedaya and Salem Salah.

Mohamed El-Gabry (Mixed Media)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 29 March.

Gathering
Cairo Atelier, Karim El-Dawla St, Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Daily exc Fri mornings, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 30 March.
Featuring works by 15 artists.

Spring (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 30 March.
Group exhibition.

Salah Enani's Cinematica (Paintings)
Doroub Gallery, 4 Latin America St, Garden City. el 354 7951. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 30 March.

Egyptian Features (Paintings)
Riash Gallery, 6 El-Gezira El-Wasta St, Zamalek. Tel 340 9994. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 31 March.

Essam Ma'rouf
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 3 April.

Gaber Nassar (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. 31 March-10 April.

Hisham El-Zeiny
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 10 April.

Remembering Mario Rossi
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9.30am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. 2-12 April.
In celebration of the Italian architect's centenary.

George Bahgory & Afif Sharfawi (Paintings)
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4pm-8.30pm. 1-15 April.
Under the title Homes and Places, the artists exhibit works inspired by Sanaa and Wahran respectively.

Valparaiso: A Legend Between Two Centuries (Lithographs, postcards & photographs)
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. 30 March-15 April. Opening hours: 30 & 31 March, 1-3 April and 6-10 April 10am-1pm & 4pm-8pm; 4 & 5 April and 11-15 April 5pm-8pm.


Valparaíso: A legend

El-Wadi El-Gadid (Photographs)
Al-Ahram Gallery, Al-Ahram Bldg, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786300. Daily 9am-10pm. Until 15 April.

AUC Art Students Exhibition
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. 30 March-16 April.

Ahmed Abdel-Karem (Paintings) & Halim Yeoub (Sculptures)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. 29 March-16 April.

Jean Crotti (Paintings)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louq. Teel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. 1-22 April.

Domestic Architecture in Islamic Egypt
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, AUC, corner of El-Sheikh Rihan and Mansour Sts. Tel 357 5436. Sun-Wed 8.30am-7pm. Thur 8.30am-5pm & Sat 12pm-5pm. Until 5 May.

Ann Parker
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. 2 April-8 May.
Photographs of haj paintings.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European arts.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

Aiko Sweet Sixteen
Japanese Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. Tel 355 3962/3. 27 March, 6pm.

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
29 March, 7pm: Identificazione Di Una Donna, directed by M Antonioni (1982).
30 March, 7pm: Un Borghese Piccolo Piccolo, directed by M Monicelli (1977).

A Double Tour
French Cultural Centre, Heliopolis annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Helinpolis. Tel 417 4824. 30 March, 7pm.
Directed by Claude Chabrol (1959), starring Jean-Paul Belmondo and Madeleine Robinson.

German Film Directors in US-Emigration
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St (ex Bustan St), Downtown. Tel 575 9877.
27 March, 6pm: Written On The Wind (1956) directed by Douglas Sirk.
1 April, 6pm: Monte Carlo (1930) directed by Ernst Lubitsch.

El Verano de la Señora Forbes
Instituto Cervantes for Spanish Culture, 20 Adly St, Kodak passage, Downtown. Tel 3601746. 2 April, 7.30pm.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Bekhit Wa Adila II (Bekhit And Adila II)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Haliaq Housh
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Hassan El-Loll
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm.

Imra'a Fawq El-Qemma (A Woman At The Top)
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Daylight
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Tin Cup
New Odeon II, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

The Hunchback of Notre-Dame
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Jerry Maguire
El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.

One Fine Day
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The Cable Guy
Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. New Odeon III, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

The Glimmer Man
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The Craft
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The Nutty Professor
Karim II, as above. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Operation Dumbo Drop
Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Maximum Risk
New Odeon I, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Chain Reaction
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Thur & Sat, midnight.

MUSIC

El-Horreya School Children's Choir
French Cultural Centre, Heliopolis annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 4174824. 27 March, 7pm.

Arabic Music Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. 27 March, 8pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

La Serva Padrona and Impresario Operas
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St. Tel 391 9956. 27 & 28 March, 9pm.
Performed by the Cairo Opera Company and Orchestra.

Amadeus Chamber Orhestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 28 March, 8pm.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, as above. 29 March, 8pm.
Music by Brahms and Beethoven performed by German piano soloist Susanne Gruetzmann and conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi.

Duo Mosalini and Sanchez
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 31 March, 8pm.
Jazz and Tango fusion.

DANCE

Perpelilmpure
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. 1 April, 8pm.
Modern dance performed by the Italian Danza Ricerca troupe.

THEATRE

Le Voyageur Immobile
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. 27 March, 1pm; 27 & 28 March, 8pm.
Performed by the Philippe Genty Company.

The Triumph of Zanni
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. 30 & 31 March, 8pm.
Performed by the Venetian Pantakin troupe.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Madinet Nasr. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 10pm.
Starring Salah El-Saadani, directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Balouza Fil Balloon (Balouza at the Balloon)
Balloon Theatre, Corniche El-Nil, Agouza. Tel 347 1718. Daily 9pm.

Messa' El-Kheir Ya Masr (Good Evening Egypt!)
Mohamed Farid Theatre, Emadeddin St. Tel 770 603. Daily 9pm.

Wada'an Ya Bakawat (Farewell, Sirs)
George Abiad Hall, Ezbekiya Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 9pm.

LECTURES

Adjustment of Liberties: Egyptian Politics in the 1990s
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Dr Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 27 March, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Eberhard Kienle.

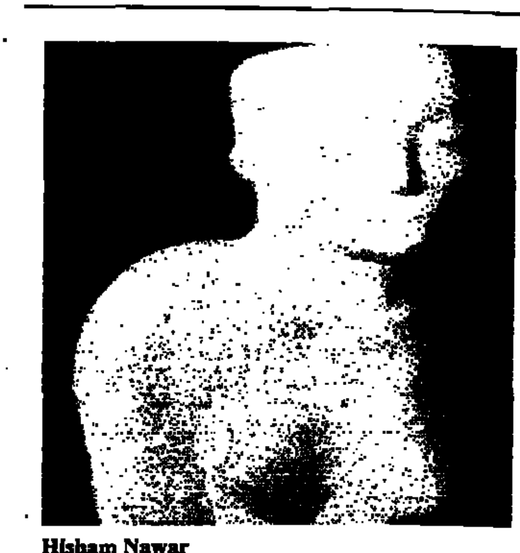
The Horses of Kush
British Council, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 0319. 31 March, 7pm.
Lecture by archaeologist Lisa Heidorn from the American Research Centre.

Alexandria in April 216, The Climax of A Drama
Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, 11 Mahalla St, Heliopolis. Tel 415 6278. 1 April, 6pm.
Lecture by Professor Adam Lukaszewicz from the Institute of Arhaeology, University of Warsaw.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries

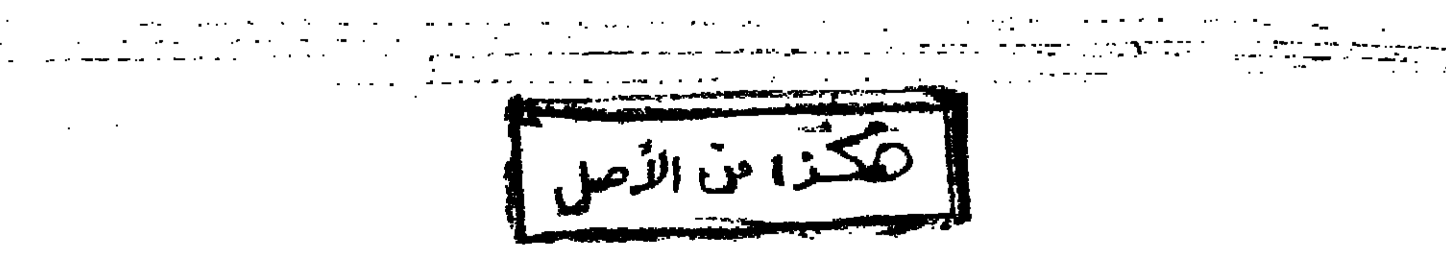

Hisham Nawar

OVER 200 sketches in pencil, together with more than 30 installations by Ahmed Nawar are on show at the **Centre for Arts**, Zamalek. Environmental concerns mingle with a pop medium in this most idiosyncratic of shows.

The **Atelier du Caire** exhibits sculptures by **Hisham Nawar** and paintings by **Ahmed El-Ganayni**. Nawar's works, though inspired by Pharaonic sculpture, flesh out its hieratic forms while El-Ganayni's paintings are hit a direct emotional nerve.

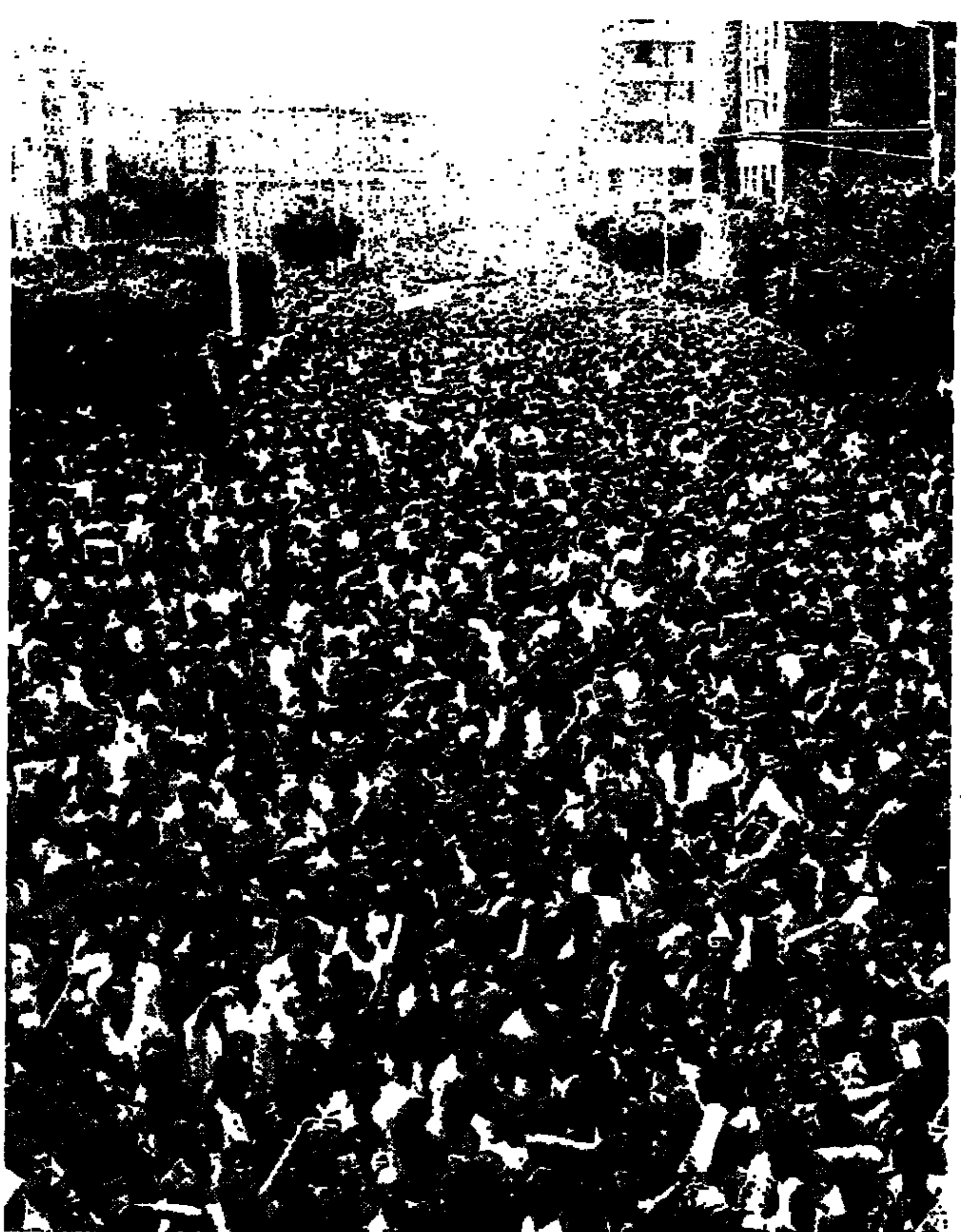
The foyer of the **Al-Ahram building**, Galaa Street, plays host to a group exhibition of works by numerous artists, but with an emphasis on paintings and watercolours by **Said Khattab**. These are mostly landscapes and still-lifes, in impressionist mode.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**



An index of emotion





Twenty years ago, on 30 March 1977, Abdel-Halim Hafez died and a generation went into mourning. For Abdel-Halim Hafez was no ordinary singer. In the years since first coming to the attention of the Egyptian public in 1953 he had developed into a legend, and on the day of his funeral Cairo came to a standstill. He had given voice to the sentiments and aspirations of an era and now it seemed that that era had come to an end. Yet in the two decades that have passed since that day the popularity of the singer has continued to grow.
Abdel-Rahman El-Abnoudi, whose collaboration with the singer resulted in 17 songs, and Nadia Lutfi, who played opposite him in *Al-Khataya* (Sins), among other films, remember both the man and his times

Left, Abdel-Halim Hafez in his first film and above, the day Cairo was brought to a standstill

At the centre of things

By Abdel-Rahman El-Abnoudi

Abdel-Halim Hafez has always been celebrated as a singer of romantic songs. But what distinguishes him from all of his contemporaries is the fact that he was not merely a singer but one who made of the song a vehicle for expressing his identity and role, as an Arab, during a very turbulent political moment, a moment when each of us was seeking some role, some contribution that might see us progress towards a better future.

Quite early on Abdel-Halim realised that there were *dozens of talented singers in Egypt but that what was* lacking was a "national" singer, a singer who would invest the song with a value other than that imbued by a mellow voice and in so doing allow the song to escape the confines of the salon and enter the public space. *Thus, his songs are a historical record of the Egyptian* revolution, from its inception to its end. They provide a historical record of the Nasserite era, in its moments both of triumph and defeat.

It is no coincidence that Abdel-Halim should be associated with the late poet Salah Jahin and with the musician Kamal El-Tawil, nor that their collaborations should appear such a singular expression of a seminal moment in the history of the Egyptian song on the one hand, and of a turbulent political moment in the history of the country on the other. Indeed, it is possible to write the history of Egypt from 1952 to the early '70s through Abdel-Halim's songs alone.

Like the rest of us, Abdel-Halim was born in one of Egypt's poor villages, the values of which he carried with him, in addition to its diseases, which finally undid him. He was an orphan, brought up in an orphanage, and the *melancholy of that sad childhood became an integral part* of his voice, of his delivery, his features — indeed, an integral part of his very image. Uniquely, Abdel-Halim was able to give voice to the emotions of a generation as no-one before him had done and in this respect his vocal chords *serve as an emotional index for his own generation* as well as those that followed. In fact, generations older than his own abandoned their singers to catch up with the youthful beat of Abdel-Halim's songs. And because he was trained, first and foremost, as a musician, *because he was possessed of innate artistic sense and prescience*, he charted his career with a dexterity and a grace that kept him at the centre of things until the end.

I first met Abdel-Halim in the mid-60s when I moved to Cairo from my village in Upper Egypt. Mohamed *Rushdi, Baligh Hamdi and I had launched the wave of shaabi* (popular) songs, which drew on Upper Egyptian folklore. This, in effect, pulled the carpet from under Abdel-Halim's feet and left him standing, looking around him in bewilderment. For the early '60s witnessed the beginnings of the regime's orientation towards the class of workers and peasants. The leadership, therefore, was in need of precisely what Mohamed Rushdi and I had to offer.

Since Abdel-Halim and I had not yet met he was obliged to hijack me. I was at some studio or the other *when he sent two tall, well-built young men to kidnap* me. At the time I thought I was on my way to the Ministry of Interior or to prison — as often happened to me then. It came as quite a surprise to find myself in Abdel-Halim Hafez' flat, and to discover that he knew of me, that he had *even* read the one poetry collection I had published. This was the beginning of my long journey with him, a collaboration that resulted in 17 songs.

Curiously, political anxieties left *little time for us to* work together on romantic songs, of which we did only three — *Ana Kul Ma 'Agoul El-Touba* (Whenever I Seek Repentance), *Al-Hawa Hawaya* (Fair Winds) and *Ahdan Al-Habayib* (In the Arms of the Loved Ones) — *though they count* among Abdel-Halim's and my most famous songs. As to the *rest of our songs*, these were dictated by the political crises and public concerns of the nation. Our finest achievement, I think, were the songs we produced at the time of the 1967 defeat, a bitter experience for both of us. We had worked on raising the morale of the public prior to the war, then came the defeat and it struck us to the core.

It was then that I wrote for him those two sad songs, now counted among the finest of Egyptian songs: *Mawaal Al-Nahar* ("A *Mawaal* for the Day") and *Al-Masih* ("*Christ Recrucified*") *which he sang at the Albert Hall* in London, in 1968.

No-one can lay claim to having directed Abdel-Halim Hafez, or to have influenced his artistic direction. He knew perfectly what each poet was capable of, the degree of his culture and the extent of his sincerity and, at the right moment, he would collaborate with the right poet and the right musician. Throughout, he managed his own affairs, according to whatever circumstances dictated. If *he interfered with the work of the poet or the musician, it* always had positive results for the text or the melody. If he inserted or added anything, it was always valid and in no way redundant.

To give sincere, genuine expression at such moments *necessitates that the artist himself be sincere*, and it is the sincerity which in turn gives the unique edge to the voice.

Although Abdel-Halim was tutored in the schools of Umm Kulthum and Abdel-Wahab, as it were, and knew their songs by heart, he always said that had their lyrics been offered to him he would not have sung them. *His* dream was to sing songs that corresponded to him as an individual, and which would project his emotions. Despite the fact that he had been a student at the Arabic Music Institute, *the art he created was of an entirely* different texture. Abdel-Halim knew precisely what he wanted, for which there can be no greater evidence than the fact that we never wrote for another singer the *kind of songs we had written for him. He* knew how to draw out of us what he wanted and only that.

Abdel-Halim had a keen awareness of political events. He always surrounded *himself with the cream of the intellectuals* of the time and made sure that he was surrounded by good conversationalists — one more respect in which he differed from other singers. When he sang the revolution, *it was not as his predecessors had* sung the praises of the king: he had faith in the ideas his songs expressed. Hence the exceptional quality of the voice. Like us, he believed that the artist had a role to *play over and above presenting the beautiful* image, the mellow words and the mellifluous tune. He believed it was for the artist, like the builder and the peasant, to put up a wall with his voice, to plant his *voice like an ear of wheat — to make of it* a loaf of bread.



Detail of a portrait by Gamal Kamel

Abdel-Halim Shabana (later Hafez)
-Born on 21 June, 1929, in Al-Halawat village, Sharqiyya Governorate. His father was a village *muazzin*, his mother died seven days after his birth.
-He spent part of his early childhood in an orphanage where he *received his first training in music.*
-In the mid-40s he came to Cairo and entered the Arabic Music Institute from which he graduated in 1948.
-Worked as a music teacher in a primary school in Tanta until *discovered by Hafez Abdel-Wahab*, a leading figure at the Egyptian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) who advised him to take up singing. In 1951 he passed the voice tests of the EBC. The Hafez in Abdel-Halim's name was adopted in recognition of Hafez Abdel-Wahab's patronage
-In 1953 he came to the attention of audiences with the song *Safini Marra* (Talk to Me) at a concert organised to commemorate the first anniversary of the 23 July Revolution. From that date onwards, the Abdel-Halim Hafez phenomenon began; he was the bard of the revolution par excellence. In 1956 he sang for Nasser "We the people have elected you", to celebrate Gamal-Abdel Nasser's election as president
-From the mid-50s until his death he played the leading role in 15 of the most memorable films produced by the Egyptian cinema, opposite some of the most famous actresses of the time — Faten Hamama, Shadia, Sabah and Mariam Fakhr El-Din — all stars who came to fame earlier but were only too happy to play opposite the idol of the young.
-Like many Egyptian peasants who had swum in irrigation canals he had contracted bilharzia. Complications surfaced in the hepatic illness that became aparent early in the 50s. By the mid-60s Abdel-Halim was *seriously ill and began endless journeys for treatment in England.* He died on 30 March, 1977 in a London hospital.

More than his voice

By Nadia Lutfi

The singer's final film, in which he played opposite Nadia Lutfi, centre

I met Abdel-Halim Hafez soon after I became an actress. There was a radio programme called *Adwa' Al-Madina* (City Lights), perhaps the most popular variety show *from the '50s and '60s.* It often organised concert trips to various capitals of the Arab world — Syria,Yemen and Jordan were among the countries visited. Abdel-Halim was usually the star at these concerts, though they would often include other singers such as Nagat Al-Saghira and *Sabah. I sometimes* joined these trips, thoroughly enjoying both the travel and the concerts, and this is how I met Abdel-Halim. and since the trips would last for a week, or sometimes more, you actually got to know people quite well.

He was *already a star when I met him and remained so* until he died, but he never made others feel that he was *number* one. He was very considerate towards his colleagues and had a very good sense of humour. He loved the company of artists, poets and writers — like Baligh Hamdi, Ihsan Abdel-Quddous, Kamel El-Shinnawi, Abdel-Rahman El-Abnoudi — and always brought people together *in interesting combinations.* But in his friendships with writers *like Ihsan* Abdel-Quddous, he was never the lesser party; rather he was an equal who was perfectly conversant with their ideas. His friendships also included politicians, like King Hussein and the King of Morocco, Hassan II, because he knew how to listen more than he spoke. And unlike so many others, he never crossed that thin line between pride and arrogance.

Abdel-Halim *also had the knack for spotting and encouraging talent.* When he came across Farouk Ibrahim's photographic work, he decided to let him photograph him — which was a big break for the photographer. Making someone happy gave him great joy: he never missed the birthdays of friends who had no claims to fame or glory. As for his family, he was anything but the kind of star *who forgets his origins when he's made it big:* Abdel-Halim was extremely loyal to his people and gave them a central place in his social life. And you always knew that he was perfectly discreet: if you shared a secret with him, it would never be repeated.

As a singer, he was probably the first to revolutionise the patriotic song by rewriting it in an emotional, romantic mode. And because he had redressed patriotism in romantic garb in his songs, people from all walks of life *and different generations sang them. And his songs were* also bearers of good tidings for Egyptians. At a time of war, the lyrics tapped the energy of people to fight. Neither before Abdel-Halim nor after him have we seen this phenomenon. *He was indeed* the son of the Nile: he had the sweetness of the Nile, the fluidity of the Nile, the thirst-slaking quality of the Nile, and the romanticism of the Nile when the moon touches it.

Although he was a superstar, Abdel-Halim took his acting very seriously. You'd find him poring over his role, studying it very carefully, registering every minute detail. He would always make a point of interacting with the actors he was going to play opposite, which is why the film dialogues *in his shots are never stilted; they come across as being* natural and intimate. Yes, he was roped in to act because he was a singer and could bring that into the film. But if you were to try and imagine the role of Hussein in *Al-Khataya* ("Sins"), for example, played by anyone else, and there were so many other gifted actors at the time, you cannot, and that is because he brought in much more *than his voice* and songs to his acting.

Plain Talk

Biographies have been enjoying something of a renaissance in the world of publishing during the past decade. Biography — in the English speaking world at least — is now firmly established as one of the most lucrative activities of publishing houses, witness the massive advances that biog*raphers now command.* I, though, have been alarmed by the recently published biographies of famous personalities, men and women, *in the West, especially in* Britain and the US. It seems that there is a campaign to delineate these personalities with a foot of clay, indeed *sometimes with two feet of* clay.

Going through a number of these biographies, I was struck by the way their writ*ers go out of their way to un*earth intimate practices in the lives of their subjects. Men are proved homosexuals and women nym*phomaniacs. It looks as if* the Western world, the Anglo-Saxon one in which I am versed, is pre-occupied with sex.

As a non-Anglo-Saxon who has been brought up, literally, on the assimilation and admiration of British cultural figures, I feel dismayed to read *what* is being written about them. True, in many cases, it is too late to allow these writings to affect my respect for Stephen Spender, *T S* Eliot, Lawrence Olivier or Peggy Ashwood, but I *wonder what* the effect of these revelations, true or otherwise, will be on the rising generations.

This is why I was happy to *see that my apprehensions* are shared with others. In an article in the *Sunday Times*, Andrew Roberts wrote on what he calls "the sexual historian hitting his paydirt". He was commenting on a newly published biography of Richard Crossman, the well-known Labour Party figure, in which it is revealed that the politician had a ho*mosexual affair with Stephen* Spender when they were both students at Oxford in the 1920's.

Andrew Roberts asks a question which *I* have always asked myself after reading such a biography: does this book constitute an exercise in truthfulness or is it merely an exercise in spoiling the memory of the people involved? Does the biographer actually do some service to his would-be readers by exposing this so far unknown side of the subject *of the biography? Another* way of putting it is, if the biographer is discreet about such details, would he be betraying his readers?

The tendency in biographies, this desire to literally undress the subject and hold him and her up to general ridicule certainly seems to appeal to readers. *More* than that, incredible sums of money are paid for the serialisation of such biographies in newspapers before they are published in book form. With the current tendency of *sensationalism* the newspapers use titles that are intended to attract attention.

In his article Roberts mentions a number of per*sonalities who have been* subjected to scandals that, in many cases, were highly exaggerated. But *it seems* that this is what the people want: *revelations of the private* lives of their heroes. To meet this instinct of curiosity, the BBC is a running a programme called *Secret Lives*. *In this programme, personal* relations are revealed. For instance, in a BBC programme, Queen Victoria and her servant John Brown were depicted as lovers, inspite of the fact that historians deny this. The BBC described the so-called affair as "one of history's most unusual love *stories*". *Of course,* such sensationalism appears simply to be geared towards generating slacious headlines in the popular press and thus ensuring *that a great deal of* free publicity is made available.

Andrew Roberts questions the authenticity of such ru*mours "in a climate,"* he writes, "where a single letter is quoted entirely out of context to prove a certain point. He gives an example *of someone who was as*sociated with Egypt, Florence Nightingale, who was described as a drug addict, and Lord Mountbatten as a bisexual.

It seems that we are living in a sex-obsessed age which tries to explain all actions with reference to Freud. But human obsessions surely go beyond sex. There are other factors that affect our lives. But, somehow, it seems that sex has a priority. It is com*forting that, so far, we have* not followed Freud to the letter and there are still certain mores and traditions that govern our lives.

Mursi Saad El-Din


photo: Randa Shaath

Gendering Yemen

Arab women are commonly described as more oppressed and exploited than their Western sisters. But women's rights activists in Egypt are growing more self-assured as they carve out their niche in society. Elsewhere in the region, new steps are also being taken to make women a priority. Yemen is a case in point. **Margot Badran** recently taught a seminar at the Women's Studies Centre at Sanaa University. Here, she describes the centre's activities, and its potential as a model for the region

Students, gathered in a classroom at Sanaa University for a seminar from one to four o'clock during Ramadan, engage in an animated discussion on women's political participation. It was a good example of the intersection of the academic and the actual. While Yemen is taken up with political debates and the mobilisation of voters, students undertook a gendered analysis of the political process. Aziza Luhum, a pioneering activist in the '70s who set a powerful example as a woman linked to two important worlds — she is the sister of prominent tribal Sheikh Abu Luhum and the wife of Muhsin Al-Aini, former prime minister and currently Yemeni ambassador to the United States — recounted her struggles in the public domain. Raufa Hassan related her experiences as a woman candidate in the 1993 electoral campaign. The night she gave a major speech in Fulaihi Square, next to the Grand Mosque in the Old City, she recalled another woman — Yemen's legendary Queen Arwa — who delivered her own political message to the inhabitants of Sanaa on that exact spot, seven hundred years ago. Reclaiming the past constitutes an important part of the process of gendering experience and charting the ebbs and flows of change.

The students attending the "Basics of Gender" seminar, forty altogether — half women and half men — were enrolled in the post-graduate programme at the Centre for Empirical Research and Women's Studies at Sanaa University. It is an autonomous centre within the university which grants post-graduate diplomas and master's degrees. The Centre is headed by Raufa Hassan, a graduate of Cairo University, who holds a PhD in socio-communication and development from Paris VII University. A pioneer in radio and television, and a well-known journalist, Hassan previously built up the Media Studies Department. As a president of the former Yemeni Women's Association and a member of other NGOs, she has long worked for women's causes and participated in numerous women and development projects.

Women's studies at Sanaa University go back to the early '90s. From the start, the university was enthusiastic. Rector of Sanaa University and distinguished poet Abdul-Aziz Al-Maqalah was a consistent and dedicated supporter. Al-Maqalah, "the poet of the 1962 Revolution," introduced a course on women in Arabic literature which he continues to teach.

The Centre is the outcome of a careful process aimed at creating a women's studies programme responsive to the realities and needs of Yemen and the region. The Women's Studies Centre has received financial assistance from the Netherlands. Dutch development specialist Marianne Nolte played an important role in supporting the project. Two weeks ago, the new Ghazal Al-Magdashiyya room was inaugurated — the first classroom at the university to be named for a woman. Nineteenth-century Yemeni populist poet, Al-Magdashiyya, intoning, "Equality, equality," declaimed: "A child is not born of a free man, nor of a slave woman."

Women's studies are an integral part of the graduate curriculum at Sanaa University. Students enrolling in women's studies hold degrees in diverse areas, such as law, public administration, sociology, media, computer science, education, and literature. The four primary programme clusters are law, education, media, and development. Professors are drawn from different faculties and departments of the university. Taught in Arabic, the women's studies programme at Sanaa is taking up the challenge of working out appropriate terminology in this continually developing field of studies. This is crucial to mainstreaming women's studies in the university and making new gender concepts and thinking accessible to the wider community, both in Yemen and in other Arabic-speaking countries.

The Centre has a global dimension as well. International exchange of students and professors, as well as special workshops and conferences, form an integral part of long-term planning. This summer, students from the University of Chicago will participate in a methodologies and research project with Sanaa University students, investigating gender practices throughout Yemen.

But the programme has a pragmatic focus, too. It privileges empirical research based on the analysis of gendered patterns of thinking and behaviour and on possible strategies for change. Students who recently presented their MA proposals to a committee of professors revealed a wide range of research interests. The topics include: women and the national elections, women and higher education in Hadhramaut, family planning, women's prisons in Sanaa and Hadhramaut, images of women in the media, the *niqab* and its economic and health implications, and women's work.

Group discussion, including disclosure of individual experience, is an important part of the pedagogic process. In a recent session on constructions of race and ethnicity, students gave personal examples of how they are variously perceived in different regions of Yemen. Airing and analysing different ways of looking at self and others — in the Tihama, Hadhramaut, Aden, Dhamar, Sanaa and Saada, for instance — is seen as directly relevant to the contemporary task of national consolidation in the post-unity period.

Students' enthusiasm for women's studies is palpable. Hannan Ba Hammed (one of her ancestors is a reputed Hadhramauti historian) who did her undergraduate work in Kuwait, where she was living with her family, finds openness at the Women's Studies Centre and a place where she can analyse her culture and society at a moment when she is re-entering her own society. Mohamed Abdel-Rahim, a judge practicing in a Sanaa court, said: "I know about woman and the law. Now, I want to know more about women's experiences." Police official Abdel-Hakim Al-Hamdani, from Ibb, who holds a degree in law, was attracted to women's studies because it is a new field. He said: "I wanted to learn more about family and society." Mona Abdallah Salem Al-Attass, from Aden, declared: "I am in the program because I am a woman." She further explained: "I studied biology and am interested in the relation of women to the environment." She hopes eventually to teach women's studies at Aden University.

Raja Abdallah Al-Mosabi, a Yemeni born in Saudi Arabia who holds degrees in media and computer science, and is editor-in-chief of the monthly *Al-Mar'a* ("Women") will continue to work in the media after completing her MA. Samira Muhsen Moussa from Taizz, who was raised by her mother and who works in a hospital psychology department, knows from personal experience that women are as capable as men. "So why," she asks, "are women considered lesser [human beings], even though they achieve more than men?" She thought she might discover some answers in women's studies. Sabah Amireddin Al-Huthi, a Sanaa high school teacher of philosophy and logic, echoed these concerns: "There is a big question mark regarding Yemeni women. I want to know why women are often treated as lower than men. I hope women's studies can give me some answers." Majida Abdel-Karim Al-Qurmuti, from Ibb, who holds a BA in biology and teaches in a primary school, explained: "I want to understand women's problems so I can help improve their conditions." Haifa Al-Asbabi from Aden wants to know "why women do not enjoy all their rights." Arwa Shajabi, also from Aden, expects to make new discoveries through research and wants to know more about feminism. Mohamed Ahmed Al-Sayaghi, who works with the Saba News Agency, wants to study the conditions of women in his society because "there is not enough public awareness of realities."

Among the international students, bi-racial American Katherine Grainger, a graduate in women's studies and political science from George Washington University, noted how the course shattered stereotypes of Muslims and Middle Easterners, rampant in the West, and remarked at how open students were to new ideas. She spoke of the value of a course on gender "with a Middle Eastern perspective." Egyptian Mohamed Fathi Mohamed, from Sohag, who completed his secondary school and university education in Yemen, is now an MA candidate in women's studies. He came to Yemen with his family. His Azharite father is currently inspector of religion for secondary schools in the Ministry of Education. Mohamed himself, who works for the Sanaa branch of an Egyptian public relations firm, confesses his unease with the way women are often portrayed in advertising. He calls himself a feminist. When asked if he had any reservations about publicly declaring this, he answered assertively: "No."

The students enrolled at the Women's Studies Centre approach women's studies, and feminism, analytically. As their comments reveal, they are eager for more knowledge of real life to help them at a moment of intensifying change in their society. If being a feminist is to be aware of gender issues and the disparate treatment, opportunities, and expectations of both women and men, most have no trouble claiming this identity. In fact, they are proud of it. Among the women's studies students, all of the men interviewed declared that they were feminists, and all but one of the women said so too. The one who refused the categorisation conceded: "Maybe I will when I finish my studies." Two women who claimed the identity confessed that they were reluctant to announce this publicly. The cautious approach of some women appears to be strategic. It is no small irony that men are freer to admit their feminism.

The Women's Studies Centre at Sanaa University is meeting intellectual and activist challenges in the move towards the next century. It is serving needs of women and men already in the workforce and those of the new generation who want to help determine their own lives and the life of their society in a period of enormous change. The programme at Sanaa University — and its success — offers a model for the region.



King cat

A friend once told me that cats — like most domestic animals — will live together in peace provided they are given adequate food and shelter. Since I have never kept goats or cows, I cannot prove her wrong in their case, but as far as cats are concerned, I have cause to differ entirely.

Our twelve cats span several generations. They come from all walks of life, but the majority were rescued from a life on the streets. They do not seem to understand that they have been invited to share our space, not to drive us out of it. While the older cats refuse to put up with each other, constantly engaging in internecine battles, the newcomers are slowly but surely pushing them out of the favoured spots in the sun. There is a marked change in the behaviour of the new generations. Somehow, they have been contaminated by the neurosis and culture of violence which predominate at the end of the twentieth century.

One of our young strays is afflicted with several modern psychological complaints, among them terrorist tendencies coupled with a persecution complex. He lives undercover, lying in wait, usually in the most inconvenient places. We only see him at meal times, when he suddenly appears from nowhere, slithering in on his fat tummy, looking over his shoulder before venturing into enemy territory. Once in the kitchen he pounces on his food, and is gone before we know it. One of his favourite hiding places is under the blankets at the foot of my bed. We have worked out a *modus vivendi*: I can still sleep in my bed, provided I only occupy the top half, bunched up, never stretching my legs beyond a certain point, which marks the frontier of his territory. If I am reckless enough to usurp what he now considers his rightfully acquired domain, I get bitten, part of his disorder being an identity problem, the main symptoms of which are his inability to decide whether he is a cat or a dog, a tough guy or a coward.

My personal experience had led me to believe that cats were instinctive racists, the Siamese despising the ordinary alley cat who had to constantly fight for his basic rights. Though this observation may still be valid for the older generations, the gang of four — two Siamese, two *baladi* — one female, three males — are living proof that race and gender are no longer an issue. The gang of four has organised itself along the lines of a regular street gang, complete with a ringleader, a vulgarly charismatic ginger with inquisitive blue eyes, who runs ahead of the pack when they go on a rampage, tearing around the house and leaving a trail of destruction in their wake.

They systematically loot the kitchen, one working the garbage bin, throwing out what he deems not remotely edible and munching heartily on cucumber peels and leftover tomatoes, while another noisily slurps the bottom of dirty cups. The third attacks the bread bin, the fourth specialises in tearing packages, gleefully spilling their contents onto the floor. Genghis Khan and his cronies could not have dreamed of doing a better job. Having finished with the kitchen, they usually proceed to chase each other playfully on top of wardrobes and cupboards, dropping suddenly onto whoever happens to be passing by below. With a decisive swipe of the paw, they clean house, ridding the shelves of knick-knacks collected lovingly over the years. They chew on precious books, scratch the wood of furniture and file their claws on expensive upholstery and Persian carpets. They exert great efforts in pulling the curtains down, then parade triumphantly on the naked rods. They push toothbrushes and soap down the drains, which they painstakingly uncover every night. They have little respect for academic endeavours, spiriting away glasses, pens and pencils and clomping across the computer keyboard to playfully claw the typist's fingers. They take their rest on top of electrical appliances, eventually clogging them with hair balls, and are in the habit of swinging from light fixtures. One of their favourite treats is a drink of coffee, which they obtain by roughly pushing their heads against the drinker's mouth, usually causing one's jaws to clash painfully, then sticking their own nose into the cup. They seldom sleep at night and take turns flushing the toilet with maddening regularity. Brought up on tinned cat food, said to give felines all the nourishment they will ever need, they still recognise the merits of a change of diet and organise daredevil operations to procure coveted morsels.

During the past year, I have seen my house ransacked several times and have dreamed of moving out, fleeing from the troops as they run amuck, but I have so far resisted any rash decision and have kept my cool, consoling myself with the thought that soon the gang of four is bound to grow out of its delinquent ways and become a sedate quartet of adults. I even blamed myself for letting them watch too much television. But time, I thought, is on my side. Recently, however, my daughter picked up a stray who had been in an accident. We nursed her back to health, whereupon she presented us with three brand new kittens. At present, mother and babies are secluded in our dining room, which had so far remained out of bounds, escaping the general desolation, and which harbours the few bits and pieces which had miraculously survived the annihilation of anything decorative around the house.

"Look, how sweet," said my daughter the other day, pointing at one of the new kittens curled up in an old Rosenthal bowl on top of the buffet. "Adorable," I had time to answer, as bowl and kitten came crashing to the floor. I wonder if this new generation will be aware of the fact that freedom fighting is out and negotiations are in. Maybe they could all be sent to a Nordic country to attend a cat conference, at which they will discuss peaceful ways of dividing up my territory.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Chicken and mushrooms in gravy

Ingredients:

One chicken (cut in 4)
One small onion (grated)
One tbsp. crushed garlic
1/2 cup white wine (or vinegar)
One can mushrooms
Butter
Corn oil
Salt + pepper + sweet paprika + allspice + cinammon + ground ginger

Method:

Season the chicken with salt and pepper only, then heat some corn oil in a frying pan. Fry the chicken parts one by one until golden on both sides and remove. In a cooking pan, fry the onion until slightly browned, then add the garlic, stir it in and add the chicken parts. Add the wine (or vinegar), then add all the spices and stir. Add the mushrooms and some of the brine, plus one cup of hot water, bring to a boil then simmer over a medium heat until the chicken parts are cooked. Serve with rice or noodles and a green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Fresher, faster food

Nigel Ryan on fast food with a pedigree

Given the plethora of fast food franchises, which seem to spawn overnight in the must unlikeliest places — blink and there is a new one on the corner — there is a danger that those in search of a quick meal will overlook older establishments that do not serve burgers or fried chicken in any of their numerous disguises. Yet in terms of variety, quality and value Cairo boasts any number of restaurants that can more than compete with the franchises.

Certainly, there is nothing slow about the service at El-Tabei, despite the fact that, at whatever time of day, the takeaway counters will be throbbing with crowds of people while the restaurant proper, located at the back of the shop, will invariably be almost full. Thankfully it is a large place, and except at the peak of peak times, there is little chance of not finding a table.

There is something of the funfair about the restaurant. The chairs are painted in bright, primary colours — orange, purple, lime green — while one wall is constructed of glass bricks, giving the impression of sitting within an aquarium. It is accidentally psychedelic, and amusingly so, an expanse of polished granite with marble clad walls around which waiters endlessly bustle carrying trays piled high with food.

The menu holds no great surprises for this type of establishment. There is lentil soup, with or without butter cream, eggs a plenty, *shakshuka*, fried aubergine, potato dishes, some with meat but the majority without, varieties of *fuul*. And there is, too, an extensive salad bar, occupying the entrance to the restaurant with, as the menu proclaims, 16 different salads.

Lentil soup, an omlette with *basturma*, and a selection of salads: order placed it took less than five minutes for the food to arrive.

To make a bad lentil soup has always struck me as an act of willful vandalism. You really have to try very hard. El-Tabei's version, supposedly without butter cream, was almost cloyingly thick, and the addition of fine noodles simply made it heavier. Quantities of lemon juice helped to lighten the load.

The salads, including a large selection of pickles, seemed fresh enough. Brown lentils, with copious quantities of garlic and lemon, and diced boiled potatoes with dill were both excellent. Omlettes, rather like lentil soup, are difficult to mess with. They simply have to be served as soon as they are ready since to leave them sitting, even for a few minutes, courts leatheriness. Fortunately everything at El-Tabei is served promptly.

What to say about such food? If the ingredients are fresh, which they were, and the staff friendly, which they are, and fast, there is little to complain about. It is good, honest food, and if it is hardly going to excite the most fastidious gastronomes, it is surely preferable to its newer, glitzier rivals. And all, incidentally, for less than LE5, including mineral water.

El-Tabei, 31, Tel: 57 54 291

Al-Ahram Weekly Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS

1. Stunted tail (4)
5. Twenty quires (4)
9. Incapacitates (5)
14. Maize bread (4)
15. Therefore (4)
16. Take effect (5)
17. Arab prince (4)
18. Undertaking (4)
19. ... days (one's youth) (5)
20. Cut off; uncouple (6)
22. Dribble (4)
24. Travel ticket initials (3)
25. Foreparts of hooves (4)
27. Wife's or husband's child from previous marriage (7)
29. Full-length outer garment (8)
33. Town in Nigeria (3)
34. Miss McGraw (3)
35. Farewells (6)
37. Poetry in rhymed stanza (4)
41. Flatten; gradation (5)
43. Have right to (3)
44. Having repetitions of subject at different pitches in same key (5)
45. New Zealand type of emu, pl. (4)
46. Shielder (6)
48. Miss Braun (3)
49. Companion (3)
51. Tied up; leashed (8)
53. Care of children during elders' absence (7)
57. and 21 down, ridge (4)
58. Mead (3)
59. Astound (4)
61. Sweepstake (6)
65. Net (5)
67. Bank service (4)
69. Woe is me! (4)
70. Disease of rye (5)
71. Emperor of Peru before Spanish conquest (4)
72. Dugout (4)
73. Simmers (5)
74. Come off (4)
75. Potato buds (4)

DOWN

1. Hastened (4)
2. Heavy book (4)
3. Measure; element (4)
4. Reprove (6)
5. Lucille Ball was one (7)
6. Poetic for "sooner" (3)
7. Long geological times (4)
8. Styles (5)
9. Sibilated (6)
10. Anecdotes 93)
11. Type of slippers (5)
12. Muse of lyric poetry (5)
13. Type of car (4)
21. Unimpregnated roe of lobster (5)
23. French summers (4)
26. Cleave (5)
28. Monetary unit in Latin America (4)
29. Tranquil (4)
30. Comb. form for "oil" (4)
31. "Long life" as a salute (3)
32. Inclined (5)
36. Lower (5)
38. Remarkable person (4)
39. Hub of wheel (4)
40. Joyous (4)
42. Discover (4)
44. Heart, jumbled (5)
46. Migrate (4)
47. Immortal (7)
50. Possessions (6)
52. Expunge (6)
53. Rudiments (5)
54. On the *qui vive* (5)
55. Yellowish grey (5)
56. Showy cup-shaped flower (5)
60. Nary a one (4)
62. Defraud; skin alive (4)
63. Clean up (4)
64. Weather directions (4)
66. Immediately (3)
68. Expert (3)

Last week's solution

هكذا من الأصل

High-tech dating for mummies

Sherine Nasr explores ways in which today's ultra-modern technology is servicing the relics of an ancient past

Modern technology has been co-opted into the battle to preserve Egypt's tombs and temples from damage caused by environmental pollution.

The most up-to-date technique of dating and preserving ancient monuments, using nuclear-based methods, has finally been introduced into this country, under a three-year joint programme, launched this month by the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), the Ministry of Scientific Research and a group of Japanese experts. In addition to dating the monuments and artifacts, the project aims to aid conservation by nuclear-based sterilisation techniques, and to make holograms to form an accurate record of the monuments.

"It has now become possible to determine the exact age of a monument or artifact using nuclear-based technology," said Mohamed El-Fiqi, head of the National Institute for Standards.

The new technology supersedes other dating methods, including *transcribing dates recorded on the object itself, and carbon-14 dating* techniques. Scientists have long searched for methods by which to date objects more accurately, and, with the advent of nuclear-based technology, the ultimate solution may have been found. "This new method," *El Fiqi* claimed, "has proved the most accurate and non-destructive to the monuments."

Although Egyptian archaeologists have been aware of the existence of nuclear-based dating technology for some years, it had not been possible to introduce it into Egypt because of lack of funds until the Japanese government agreed to finance the current programme.

The Giza Plateau was the first test area for the new technique. "The whole area was surveyed and pottery was taken for case study," said El-Fiqi. A comparison between dating based on archaeological data and nuclear methods "did not show striking differences, but the nuclear-based study proved to be more accurate."

El-Fiqi explained that the nuclear dating of ancient monuments gives results as precise as "minus to plus 10 years maximum," and that "such accuracy is almost impossible to attain through the other, established methods."

There are two different dating techniques, one for inorganic material such as pottery, glass and ceramics, and another for organic material including mummies, nails or hair. All objects, including the clay from which ancient pottery is made, contains radioactive material, El-Fiqi explained. When matter is heated, the atoms acquire energy and are released, "so the energy level in the nucleus becomes empty. Pottery is shaped through heating and we define this stage as the zero age of an object," he said. The soil into which an object is buried also contains *radioactive material. Once buried, some soil is stored inside* the "zero-aged" clay object, which survives through the ages. In order to examine the age of an object, a piece of crystal, which works as a nuclear detector, is buried where the object was found. "We measure the level of radiation accumulated in the crystal in a month, for example, and compare it to the level stored in the excavated object to determine its exact age," El-Fiqi explained.

The techniques have attracted the interest of a number of Egyptian experts with doctorates in this field. "They now work closely with the SCA," said El-Fiqi. "They are informed of newly-discovered sites so that they can carry out surveys before any change or damage occurs."

Sterilisation using nuclear-based technology, another important part of the programme, aims to tackle bacteria growth on monuments and artifacts. Humidity resulting from subterranean water leads to the growth of the bacteria, which destroys the colour of temple walls. "This bacteria is equally destructive to mummies, ancient papyri and textiles," El-Fiqi said.

Exposing an object to radioactive cobalt, which produces gamma rays, kills the bacteria. According to El-Fiqi, France used this method to treat Ramses II's mummy, and it has the advantage of only needing to be done once.

Making holograms of ancient artifacts by using laser beams is the third technique being used by the Egyptian-Japanese team. "These holograms are an identity card for each of the artifacts," El-Fiqi explained. The object is scanned and reproduced in the form of a hologram, which is not only identical to the object but shows it from all angles. One important aspect of the technique is that "it has become impossible to fake a replica." This, he added, "is a vital step towards preserving genuine artifacts sent on exhibition abroad."

The technique has successfully been applied to Mohamed Ali's jewellery collection in Alexandria, where each of the items now has a hologram. Once the joint project is completed, Egyptians will continue to use these modern techniques.

Discovery of the century: Found virtually intact in 1922 by Howard Carter, the treasures of Tutankhamun's tomb stunned the world. Made of gold, stone or clay, the rich heritage of ancient Egypt can now be preserved using nuclear-based sterilisation techniques

Skeletons and spies

Sahar El-Bahr tours the Middle East's only crime museum



One of this century's cruelest criminals: Sekina with her husband





(l-r) El-Nahhas, El-Noqrashi, El-Banna

Most people who pass by the *National Centre for Judiciary Studies* in Abassiya Square take no note of the building's exterior: it looks like any other government office structure. The facade gives no indication what is housed inside, on the fourth floor.

Perhaps the anonymous grim-faced skeleton, *which greets visitors with* an outstretched arm bone, is the first striking clue. It is one of many items which make up a curious collection of memorabilia housed in the centre's Crime Museum — the only such house of horrors in the Middle East.

On the wall to the left of the bony host *is a series of photographs which* tell the tale of the German spy John Woolf. These visual documents show the stables he bought upon arrival in Egypt in 1965. For the next five years, Woolf spied for Israel from this post. Also in house are his tools of the trade: a cipher and scales. Woolf hid the equipment he used for spying inside ordinary household objects.

More espionage tales are displayed throughout the museum. The collection contains objects belonging to the Israeli spy Victor Levy, who was apprehended in Alexandria in 1954. The objects in the museum include a thick book where he hid a wireless radio and the key to a flat he used in his spying activities.

Further along, 40 authentic broken skulls are on display. These skulls show holes, cracks and fractures caused by bullets, stones and beatings with sharp objects. "Skulls like these are not displayed anywhere else in Egypt or in the Middle East," noted Hesham Mohamed Ahmed, curator of the collection.

A diary, wooden *sebha* (beads of the Muslim rosary) and watch stand next to a picture of Hassan El-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. He was carrying these items when he was assassinated in 1949.

There are also items on display from numerous narcotics cases including an iron box, *qabaqib* (wooden slippers) and household belongings in which smugglers hid drugs.

Visitors should prepare themselves for some unsettling exhibits: the throats of people who died of *asphyxia caused by a date, an olive and a* small fish have been preserved and are on view. One can clearly see these items lodged in the larynges of the victims.

A large collection of rare and historical documents are, however, the museum's most valuable collections.

Many of these documents are stored on microfilm. Original papers and documents from some of the strangest and most controversial cases in Egypt's history can be viewed in the microfilm centre. In 1983, these documents were collected from Dar El-Qadaa El-Aali (the Supreme Court building) downtown and Dar El-Mahfouzat (the National Archives building) explained the centre's director, Adila Khalil.

"There are *more than half a million documents from* 422 cases registered on microfilm. These are not only valuable to lawyers and those working in the field of law, but they are also of great political, social and historical value," Khalil noted.

The documents go through a long process of restoration: they must be cleaned, classified, arranged, restored, chemically treated and finally registered on microfilm.

"It took six months to restore the 2,000 documents from the case of convicted killers Raya and Sekina. Even the modern cases, like Farag Fouda's [the secularist writer assassinated by Muslim extremists], take considerable effort due to the previously unscientific ways of restoring and handling them," explained Khalil.

Raya and Sekina's is possibly Egypt's most well known crime case this century. In 1919, these two sisters robbed and murdered 17 women in one year. Their story has been adapted for the silver screen. In 1921, they, together with the four men who helped them, *including the husbands of both sisters*, were *sentenced to* death. The report of their death described Sekina as defiant during her execution, whereas Raya was pale and distraught.

The cases which have the largest exhibits are those of the Cairo Fire of 1952, *involving 50,000 documents and Muslim Brotherhood* leader Sayed Qutb, containing 10,000 documents.

The most controversial case on microfilm is that of Commander-in-Chief Abdel-Hakim Amer. Shortly after Israel defeated Egypt in June 1967, and following a *falling out with President* Gamal Abdel-Nasser, he allegedly committed suicide. To this day, there are those who claim that Amer's death, by poison, was murder and not suicide.

Records of famous assassinations and attempted assassinations can be viewed as well, including the assassination of prime ministers Butrous Ghali in 1910 and Mahmoud Fahmi El-Noqrashi in 1948; Ahmed Maher in 1945; Mostafa El-Nahhas, who survived three attempts on his life; Saad Zaghloul, who lived through two attempts in 1924 and Hassan El-Banna killed in 1949.

According to Counsellor Ali El-Sadek, under-secretary of state for judicial *affairs, a presidential decree issued in* 1981 established a centre for training the members of the judicial authority in the collection and preservation of famous documents. Another ministerial decree, issued in 1983, joined the judicial museum with the centre.

Winds of change

The sun and the wind will have more to do in the next century than simply drying the laundry.
Sherine Nasr investigates

The sun may go down over Egypt at night but its energy still works on — lighting the Cairo-Alexandria highway and providing power for telephones along the route.

Using the two major environmentally-sound sources of energy, the sun and the wind, is a growing trend in Egypt.

"It has become a major goal to save the environment and to reserve natural resources for future generations as well," said Layla Abdel-Qawi, head of the Wind Energy Department at the New and Renewable Energy Authority (NREA).

In a country which boasts an abundance of both wind and sun, the *potential is vast.*

"The sun shines brightly almost throughout the year, and the wind's speed in many sites along the Mediterranean and the *Red Sea* coasts could be used for wind farms," said Essam El-Hennawi, an environmental expert from the National Research Centre.

The first scientific attempt to exploit wind energy in Egypt was carried out in the 1980s when 44 wind measuring stations were set up throughout the country. Tests revealed good wind energy potential *along the northern coast, the western* coast of the Gulf of Suez, South Sinai and the Oweinat Oasis area in the Western Desert. Several wind farms were then established by the *NREA* in Hurghada, Ras Ghareb and Zafarana with an aim to provide almost five per cent of Egypt's total energy requirements from renewable energy sources by the year 2005.

But Egypt's biggest wind farm yet — which could alone provide half of the national energy requirements from renewable sources — is currently being developed in *Zafarana, almost 60km south of Ein* El-Sokhna, with the help of German-Danish expertise.

Wind farms are situated in open-air, accessible areas which enjoy a northerly flow of wind. A varying number of 30m-high towers with three 14m-long blades, which rotate with the slightest wind movement, are connected to a turbine to generate energy.

"The blades are now made of the thinnest type of metal so that they can move easily," said El-Hennawi.

The sight of these giant windmills is expected to become more familiar over the next few decades as both the public and private sectors invest in alternative energy. The publication of the NREA's *Wind Atlas in Egypt* which identifies the potential wind areas should also encourage more investment.

Solar energy, less used than the wind, is in greater use in some African countries than it is in Egypt. Solar energy-operated television sets and cooking pots are far more common in Kenya and Nigeria. In Egypt it is only used in the newly developed areas along the Red Sea and the northern coast and the areas where electricity is unavailable.

"Almost all of the tourist villages have a solar energy system to heat the water," said El-Hennawi. "Yet producing this energy on a large scale and introducing it to the already well-established residential areas is still too costly to apply."

The use of the sun and the wind for energy is nothing new.

"*Making use of the wind energy is* as old as the first time man used a sailing boat," said El-Hennawi. Wind was also used to pump out subterranean water, particularly in the desert areas. "The ancient Egyptians used solar energy to dry the seeds. Peasants nowadays do the same in the countryside," he added.

But with the advent of modern technology, it is now possible to make the utmost use of these renewable forms of energy.

Compared to diesel oil, the most used source of energy, solar and wind energy are much better for the environment and man's health. Petroleum and its products contain lead, zinc, sulphur and nitrogen oxides which are released when burnt and cause serious respiratory and blood diseases and cancer.

Environmentalists point out that the process of producing the photo cells, which absorb and preserve the sun's energy, and the equipment for wind farms still cause pollution. "But except for this phase, and the fact that wind farms may disturb and sometimes kill migratory birds, the energy emitted from both sources is 100 per cent clean," said El-Hennawi.

Although the pace of scientific research into renewable energy has *slowed down* over the last decade, it is now high on the agenda of the major oil companies — largely because of the sudden drop in the *price of crude oil.*

As less expensive technology becomes available and social acceptance grows, the sun and wind look set to make ever increasing contributions to Egypt's total energy.

"Petroleum companies are racing to produce better and more applicable technologies so that they do not get stuck when crude oil is totally depleted," the NREA's Abdel-Qawi *explained.*

Buoy up for the corals

The battle to preserve the treasures of the Red Sea is moving steadily forward, thanks to local efforts and an international donor. Sherine Nasr watched the installation of mooring buoys which could help save Egypt's coral life



REEF THIEVES: Anchoring may be curbed to protect the coral reefs but indiscriminate reef pickings continue. Photographer Jihan Ammar captured a reef thief displaying his spoils for sale in Hurghada. The front door to the reef may be guarded but the back door is clearly open!

It only took 45 minutes, but the installation of 250 mooring buoys in Hurghada will ensure the unhampered regrowth of coral for years to come.

Fleets of boats taking tourists to nearby islands normally anchor on coral reefs, causing irreparable damage to the marine ecosystem. But the new buoys, which were placed during an event attended by the Red Sea governor, environmentalists, members of USAID and the private sector will mean that boats can moor without harming the reefs.

"Hurghada receives tourists by the thousand every week, the majority of whom come for the water sports," said Captain Moustafa Taher, head of Hurghada Environmental Protection and Conservation Association (HEPCA), which is running the project.

In 1979, there were only 20 boats. Now there are over 750 which give tourists access to the offshore islands and coral reefs, Taher said.

"It is not reasonable to prevent anchoring on the reefs without providing a suitable alternative," he added.

Damage to the reefs has been recorded by HEPCA in popular diving areas such as Giftun, Abu Ramada and Magawish and its efforts to solve the ever-pressing problem impressed the USAID Ecotourism Initiative for the Red Sea.

In a bid to promote environmentally-friendly tourism in the area, USAID agreed to fund moorings in Hurghada, Safaga and Quseir at a cost of $250,000, while HEPCA was responsible for their installation and maintenance.

Previous efforts by HEPCA had led to the installation of 100 mooring buoys, but these later proved too few.

"The situation improved for a while but as diving activities increased, the moorings proved insufficient," said Taher. "Unfortunately, most of the buoys were lost or damaged because of misuse by boat crews as well as maintenance and replacement deficiencies."

John Whistley, director of USAID, described the project as "a small but critical move which will ultimately reduce the damage to fragile coral reefs by indiscriminate anchoring practices."

Prior to installing the buoys, biological assessments of the health of coral reefs were carried out by diving centres, rangers from the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) and HEPCA at different dive sites in Hurghada, Safaga and Quseir.

The information will be updated periodically to help assess changes in the health and diversity of the coral.

"In addition to its scientific value, this data will assist in developing management plans for regulating the intensity of activities and the use of key dive sites in the area," said Whistley.

The initial 250 buoys were placed at priority locations where there is intensive diving activity.

Meanwhile, an equally vital step in the protection of marine life, the training of the people who will use the buoys, is under way.

"More than 150 captains have already completed the Dive Boat Captain Training Programme and have qualified for a certificate by the Red Sea governorate and the EEAA," said Captian Shafiq Wahdan, HEPCA managing director.

Completion of the training programme will eventually be a requirement for obtaining or renewing the captains' licence.

With the help of the EEAA, six rangers have been hired to supervise diving and other maritime activities.

But the project does not stop there. More than 600 mooring buoys are expected eventually to be installed along the coast.

"When the first stage is finally completed, HEPCA expects to receive more mooring buoys for installation in Quseir and Marsa Alam as greater tourist density is anticipated to extend southward," said Captian Wahdan.

Travellers' book guide

A love affair with Egypt

Great Cairo: Mother of the World by Desmond Stewart has come onto the market again, published by the American University in Cairo Press

It is a pleasure to re-read this delightful book. The author's love for Egypt is reflected in every word, and his deep and genuine understanding of its difficulties can be felt throughout.

For Desmond Stewart, Cairo was the oldest city in the world, through whose heart the world's longest river flowed. He regarded it as the centre of the universe, with Memphis, the first capital, and Heliopolis, the religious capital, surviving for thousands of years. The author traces the history of Cairo through the Pharaonic, Coptic and Islamic periods, and explains why one ruler after another chose to rule from the same site as Menes, the first Pharaoh, who, in 3,000 BC, built his capital at the apex of the Nile delta.

Here, of course, is where Stewart's emotional attachment over-rode the fact that he could not quite make the distinction between the historical and geographical scope of a book about Cairo. Stewart appears to have been confused by the fact that the Arab historian Ibn Khaldun called Cairo *Misr Umm Al-Dunya* (Egypt, Mother of the World), and the fact that the name *Misr* is used to refer to both the country and the capital. "Modern Egyptians use two names to refer to Cairo, the first and most important is *Misr*," he wrote. "This name, which predates the Muslim Arabs, is vague and haunting. It refers to the whole country as well as to its capital. Someone who announces 'Tomorrow I travel to *Misr*' may mean, if he says this in Paris, that he is going to Egypt; if he says this in Alexandria, that he is going to Cairo. The sharing of one word for country and capital makes things easier for a writer who would in any case have to interweave the two. It also underlines the extent to which Egypt, since its unification under the First Dynasty pharaoh, has been a centralised state."

Great Cairo
Mother of the World
Desmond Stewart

Stewart further explains that the name *Misr* is timeless, while what became Cairo, or *Al-Qahirah*, is linked to a specific date: 5 August 969. He believes the meaning of the word *Al-Mahrousa* (the guarded) — another name for Cairo — originally referred to the high walls which surrounded it. The names 'Mother of the World' and 'the guarded,' he says, are examples of "Arab hyperbole echoed from Morocco to Kuwait."

Cairo's stresses and pains, its triumphs and problems, cut a stencil which fits the experience of later cities, the author claims. When Constantinople was founded, the southern tip of the Egyptian delta (Cairo) had already witnessed a formidable history of urban habitation.

Stewart wrote that his book was "the product of a love affair with a city spanning the late 1950s and early 1960s. Although the passion mellowed into affection, Cairo still seems to me — for its history and what survives of its buildings — one of the most fascinating cities in the world."

The Nile, he stressed, was the life of Egypt. Cairo's prosperity was dependent on a river and a geographical location. When the Nile ran low, men died of famine. Cairo, he maintained, was not the capital of Egypt and the Arabs alone, but of the entire Third World.

Stewart, naturally, devoted the greater part of his book to Islamic Cairo, and shows how, as this religious empire evolved, Egypt's affairs were controlled successively by Medina in Arabia, Damascus in Syria and Baghdad in Iraq, until Ibn Tulun turned his fiefdom into an independent state. To underline this, he decided to build a new capital, Al-Askar, extending from the hillock of Jebel Yashkur to the rocky spur of the Moqattam. He built an aqueduct to bring water to his palace from the fresh springs south of the city. Stewart not only details the buildings completed under the Fatimids, when the bustling and countless markets of Cairo were crammed with every form of produce, but he also describes the city as it was, with a bridge of 36 boats in a row linking Roda Island to the east bank of the Nile.

Inside the city, he claimed, everyone rode mules or donkeys and there were an estimated 50,000 beasts of burden available for a small fee. The Nile was used for pleasure. Its banks were lined with kiosks and pavilions where one could sit and drink freshly drawn water, listen to music and admire the sunset. What a description!

What Desmond Stewart stressed here was a sense of security which buttressed that prosperity, saying, "The merchants, jewellers and money changers of *Misr* did not bother to lock the doors of their shops when they left them for some purpose."

This book, like the others Desmond Stewart has written about Egypt, or with Egypt as a setting, reflect his love and admiration for what he sometimes called "my second country."

His books with Egypt as a theme include: *Early Islam*, *The Pyramids and Sphinx*, *The Temple of Janus*, *T.E. Lawrence* and *The Sequence of Roles*, which is a trilogy involving three generations of a Scottish family in Cromer's Egypt. He also wrote a novel about the Egyptian Revolution called *Men of Friday*.

Desmond Stewart rented a flat in the centre of Cairo on a permanent basis, and there he died suddenly in June 1981.

Reviewed by **Mursi Saad El-Din**

Unusual find

THREE tombs were discovered on the east bank of Aswan, announced Ali Hassan, head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), this week. He said that the three sarcophagi, which date back to around 750 and 322BC, were well-preserved as the original colour could still be traced. The find may give way to the discovery of a whole cemetery in the same area.

A team from the SCA, supported by Japanese and French experts, will embark on studying the material and art style of these sarcophagi.

To the best of Egyptologists' knowledge, tombs are generally located on the west bank of the Nile. The fact that these sarcophagi were found on the east bank makes it a quite extraordinary discovery, Ali Hassan commented.

هكذا من الأصل

Sticky hands syndrome

Over the last few years, Nader El-Sayed has managed to become one of Egypt's best goalkeepers. **Abeer Anwar** spoke to the young goalie

In football, the goal is sacred turf. Woe be to anyone who tries to step in and woe to any goalkeeper who lets them in. For Nader El-Sayed, the Egyptian national football team's goalie, this dictum, however cliché, is the lifeblood of the game and the reason why he has managed to carve a name for himself in the sport.

El-Sayed got his start in the game at an early age, in the village of *Dekernes, Dakahlia*. At the tender age of seven, El-Sayed, who later came to be known as *El-Salahat* (the Saviour), was active in a number of sports. But it was football to which he was drawn first and foremost.

Early afternoon matches with his friends were the usual melange of rambunctious child-play, albeit with a pseudo-*professional touch*. He would divide the players into two teams, Ahli and Zamalek and keep for himself the coveted position of goalie. "From the start, I've always felt that my place was in the goal," *recalled* El-Sayed.

With encouragement from his uncle, El-Sayed's skill, speed and strength quickly developed. Using utilitarian, yet effective training tools like placing the young goalie behind a large rock which he would have to leap over to catch the ball, his uncle, he says, was instrumental in helping him hone his speed and concentration. "I had no other way to catch the ball but to jump over the rock," said El-Sayed. "If I tried to avoid it, I would just end up falling over the rock."

Seven years later, his rock training seemed to have paid off, earning him a position in the Dakahlia's under-16 governorate team. From here on, it was nowhere but up. While a member of the junior team, some of El-Sayed's friends took him to practice with them in the Zamalek club where he met several professional coaches and players like *Adel El-Ma'mour* and Ahmed Mustafa.

These two veteran football players, watching him practice with his friends, saw in El-Sayed the potential for a top-notch goalie. "It was luck, pure and simple, that they discovered me," said El-Sayed. "*But it was the opportunity I was* waiting for."

Young and full of enthusiasm, he began training with Zamalek's under-16 team. "Feeling that I was playing alongside professionals made me double my efforts, especially that Hussein El-Sayed was the team's goalkeeper at the time whereas I was just a rookie," recounts the 23-year-old national team goalie.

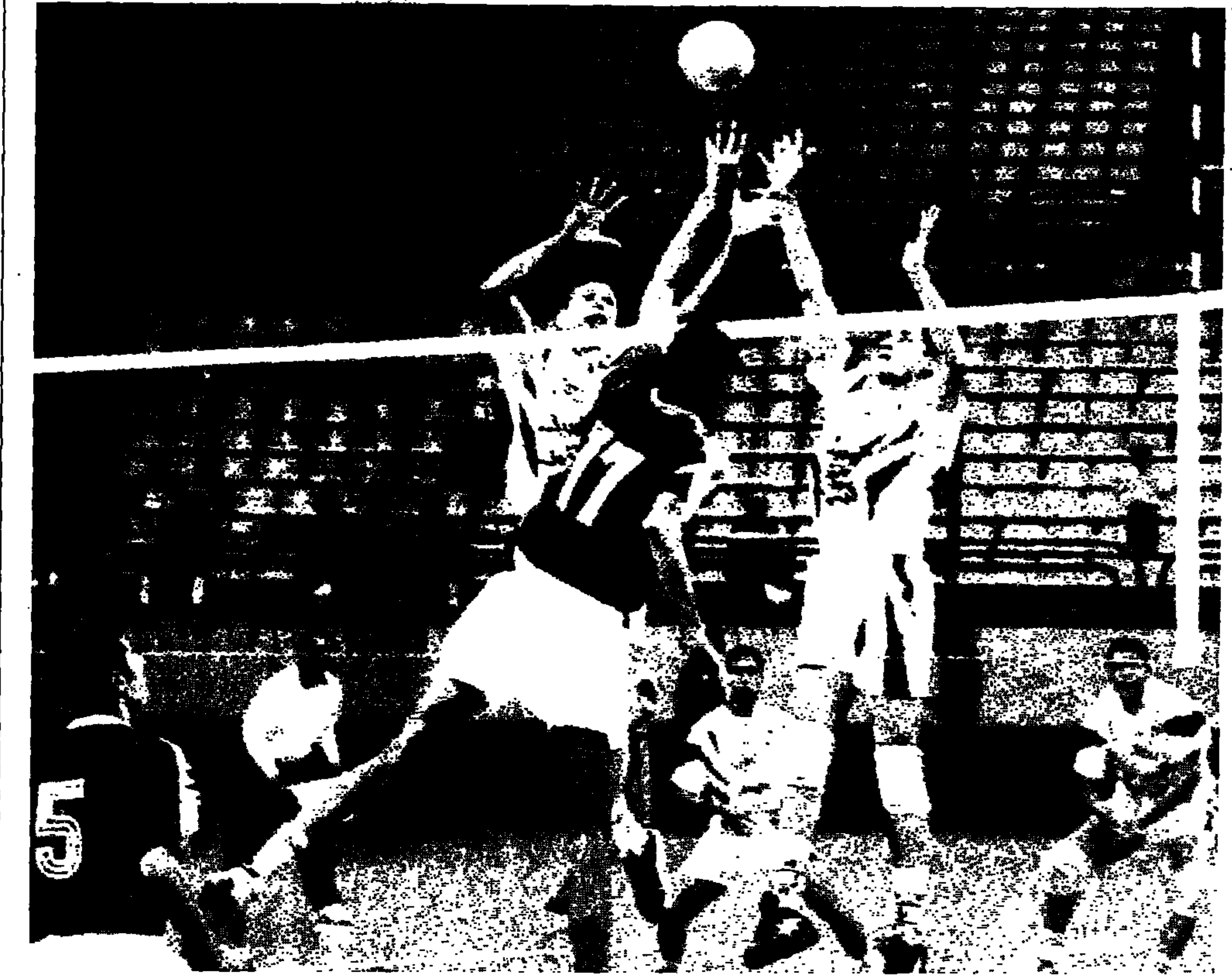
*Under the close super*vision of his coaches, with extensive training, El-Sayed was able to quickly earn a place for himself five years ago, on the national, in addition to his spot in Zamalek's team.

*El-Sayed's commit*ment to the game, coupled with his skill, has made him the bane of any and all who face off against him, especially during penalty shots.

"I rely mainly on fitness and concentration *when I am in goal*," he said. "This is especially true during penalty shots, where I become very focused, forget about the players around me and concentrate only on the ball."

Since taking his place *in goal for the national* team in 1992, El-Sayed has played in about 45 matches, the first of which was in the Arab Tournament in Egypt's match against Jordan. *Although this was his* first match, his talent was noticed early on, and he was awarded the distinction of best Arab goalkeeper in the competition. Additionally, although he has received offers from a number of European clubs, he has opted to stay in Egypt, saying that he will not consider such offers until he has left his *imprint* on Egyptian football.

He, however, is not one to sit on his haunches and enjoy the limelight. Well aware of the fact that there are many talented goalies playing in the game, El-Sayed is obsessed with staying at the top through strenuous exercise, training and drills.



Zamalek's Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz and Ahmed Kamal block Ahli's Ayman Rushdi's ball in their league's final match

Zamalek spike Ahli's dreams

An Ahli-Zamalek volleyball super-league championship match witnessed as much insult hurling as ball spiking. **Abeer Anwar** reports

After a four year absence from the national volleyball scene, Zamalek made a startling comeback last week, *snatching the league title from long-time* league champions, Ahli. The 15-7, 15-10, 15-12 win over Ahli in the third and final match of the league championship, in which these two teams competed against Ithihad and Tersana, was a tremendous morale boost for what had been till then an-ailing Zamalek team.

"I can't believe it," *exclaimed an elated* Gaber Abdel-Ati, the team's coach. "But the players worked hard, had the strength and the skill to secure the title and deserved this win."

Jubilation aside, however, the road to the league title was not easy. For two weeks, two super-league volleyball tournaments were staged end to end between the four top teams, Ahli, Tersana, Itihad and Zamalek. In the first tournament, which was held in the Zamalek Club's indoor hall, resulted in a *staggering 3-0 defeat for Zamalek at the hands of a* combat tested Ahli squad.

Their ears still ringing from the taunts and angry cries of disgruntled Zamalek fans, the team turned up the heat in the second tournament, as it once again faced off against Ahli, after both had trounced Itihad and Tersana. Ahli, in whose stadium the second tour*nament was being held*, was not about ready to hand over a title they had held for the past four years. However, a determined Zamalek crew, from the start, seemed hell-bent on breaking their arch-rival's winning streak.

The strategy, said the Zamalek coach, was to let Ahli defeat itself. True to form, Ahli put their all into the first two sets, winning both, but also losing a good deal of energy in the process. It was then that Zamalek stepped in. Amid a bevy of insults hurled *from Ahli fans, and cheers from their Zamalek* counterparts, the team went on to decisively win the next three sets and the match, 3-2.

"The win," said Abdel-Ati, "was not luck as the Ahli team would like us to believe, but the result of a strong and organised performance by the players."

The Ahli squad, however, had another explanation for the startling upset. "It was just bad luck on our behalf," said Ibrahim Fakhreddin, Ahli's technical manager. "The players were tired because they have played too many matches in too short a time."

"But we will have our revenge in the cup competition," he predicted. Perhaps, but shouldn't you consult with Zamalek first?

Barada up against Khan

Ahmed Barada is set to join the crème de la *crème of the squash world* at the Super Serious Squash Championship in London, reports **Eman Abdel-Moeti**

Squash fans around the world glued to their television sets to watch the upcoming Super Serious Squash Championship in London, starting on 26 March, may be in for a surprise. New to the ranks of the world's top eight squash players who will be competing in the tournament is Egypt's Ahmed Barada, whose recently secured number seven world ranking puts him head to head with the likes of Janshir Khan and Peter Nicole.

But Barada, who will be the first Egyptian to ever compete in this tournament, is undaunted. "When I found out who I would be up against and especially *the order of the matches, I was not happy at all*," he said. "But then, I thought to myself, I train hard enough, I'm up for the challenge."

Challenging it will be for the young squash star who just six months ago was ranked number 14 in the world. To make it into the semi-finals and finals of this exclusive, two-pool tournament, he will have to overcome not only world number one, Khan, and Nicol, a man he has yet to defeat, but also the tasteless *British cuisine*.

Barada, however, seems to have stumbled on what may prove to be the recipe for success — get rid of the old training crew and replace them with a power team that uses precision scientific training methods. For weeks now, Barada has been following a rigorous training programme under the watchful eyes of his coach, *Medhat Galal, and physical fitness expert*, Abdel-Hamid Aref.

"We are preparing Barada to be the world's number one player," stated Aref. "But that will take time and will not happen unless the training programme is care*fully planned out and implemented*."

To that end, Mohamed El-Menshawy, the Barada team's new manager, has been invaluable in helping the young champ select the best tournaments in which to compete. "In the past, I used to participate in any championship," recalled Barada, "Now, however, I only take part in nine competitions so as not to wear myself out."

Undoubtedly, the confidence gained by having a *strong and efficient support system will play a major* role in this and forthcoming competitions, but Barada is not taking anything for granted. "Being able to participate in the Super Serious is a major accomplishment for me," he said, stressing that the competition will be a source of tremendous experience in helping him reach his goal of being ranked number four in the next six months.

Egypt clubs clear opening obstacles

THE EGYPTIAN holders of the major African club titles safely cleared the first hurdles in defence of their cups this weekend, first with champions Zamalek shrugging off a poor showing in their local matches to tie 1-1 with Saint George in Ethiopia. Consequently, they were able to reach the last 16 of the Champions' League with a 3-1 aggregate. During the match, Tesfaye Urhecho gave outsiders Saint George a 34th-minute lead in Addis Ababa, which was quickly negated by mid-fielder Qassi Said's equaliser, two minutes later.

Similarly, the Cup-Winners Cup kingpins, the Arab Contractors, struck twice during the first half of their match against Kenyan newcomers *Mumias Sugar*, to defeat their opponents 2-0 in Cairo following a goalless first encounter. The Contractors were indebted to the goals of Tamer El- Nahas, when conquering Africa a third time last year. El-Nahas's third-minute strike placed the team on the road to the second round.

Egypt's third team to participate in the African competitions, Mansoura, also newcomers, scored a 2-0 victory over Sudan's Merikh to reach the last 16 of the Winners Cup on a 3-0 aggregate, after winning the first match in Sudan two weeks ago, 1-0.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Al-Ahram Weekly





Aliyya Shabana:

Twenty years after Abdel-Halim Hafez's death, little has changed. The room is as it was when he left it. He could walk in the door at any moment. The careful curator is waiting

The way it used to be

Around 1963, Abdel-Halim Hafez came to occupy a flat in the building where I grew up as a child. When he moved in, he brought with him an extended family. This is something which perhaps not many people know of 'Halim'. Ever since he left the village of Halawat, Sharqiyya, along with his elder sister Aliyya, their two brothers and a cousin, they have always lived very close. Halim occupied the flat on the seventh floor. He was at the apogee of his fame then, a larger-than-life figure.

From the day he moved in, the building on the now famous corner of Hassan Sabri and Qaraqosh streets came to be known as "Abdel-Halim's building". People thought he owned it, although he was just a tenant. No mention of the Gheitas, the Foudas, the Abul-Fotouhs, or any of the other wealthy landowning families who lived there. It seemed poetic justice that the presence of this once poor peasant boy would overshadow that of the wealthiest and most powerful bastions of Egyptian society.

I have two clear memories of that time. One is of the *Sham El-Nessim* (spring festival) rehearsals, during which the orchestra would camp out in his house for weeks, and we would hear his exquisite voice during training. The other is the peals of infectious laughter coming from the seventh floor, particularly that of Halim's housekeeper, Nabawiyya. I always thought that Abdel-Halim's family must have a very nice time up there — they brought vitality to the place.

Twenty years after Halim's untimely death, little has changed in the appearance of his home — to the extent that one could almost think he is still alive. This is, perhaps, because those who lived with him, and the locale they occupied, have remained unchanged. The youngsters who used to stop by the building and look up at his balcony in the hope that they might catch a glimpse of him, still do the same until the present day. His sister Aliyya, who maintained Halim's household when he was alive, still manages the house as if he was there, keeping everything as it used to be. Upon entering the flat, one feels that time has stood still for twenty years.

She is an extension of him, much as he was of her. To him, she was a mother figure, although she is not that much older than him. Today, a woman approaching her seventies, she still exudes strength and solidity. Though not very tall, she has a clear face, very much resembling his were it not for the fact that his illness had made his face emaciated. It is she who shouldered that famous sense of orphanage and loss that was Halim's trademark, which so much endeared him to the hearts of millions. "Halim was only seven days old when our mother, Zeinab, died. I remember the day she died... women walking her about, to and fro across the room. I was playing and singing as usual. I felt nothing. Then they told me she had died. I could not understand the meaning of death. I told them my mother, Zeinab, has not died." Aliyya called her only daughter Zeinab.

Does she regret not having had a son? "I wish Halim had not died," she blurts. She does not remember what their father looked like. She remembers his voice, though: "He had the most beautiful voice. He was the *muezzin* in our village. We never took any photographs then, we are *fallahin* — *fallahin* never have photographs, never."

Strange as it may seem, she still has almost no photographs, of herself or of Abdel-Halim. "They're all gone. I kept giving Halim's photographs away after he died, to people, and to our brother Ismail who was compiling something about him." It was later that she felt the loss of things she had once thought trivial. In his apartment, the only portrait of him is an oil painting, done by Gamal Kamil. It is the original of the famous image that appears on numerous album covers and biographies.

Aliyya did not move out of Halim's flat when he died. She had come to live with him and run his house six years before his death, when she separated from her husband. Until the time he moved to his Zamalek flat, Halim, ever since he had the means to do so, had rented apartments for his sister, brothers and cousin with their families, always in the building where he lived. From El-Pasha Street in Manial, to the Saudi building in Agouza, they followed him wherever he went.

"He called the inside part of the flat, where I was staying with our cousin Fardous, 'Sharqiyya'. The outside reception area, overlooking the Fish Gardens, where he received guests and friends, he called Zamalek." Halim hardly mixed with his neighbours, but the stream of visitors coming to his flat was never-ending.

Over the many years I lived in the same building, I recall seeing him only once or twice. I vividly recall one occasion: I was on my way to school, very early in the morning, and I saw him walk into the elevator I had just stepped out of, wearing a scarf and dressing gown. It added to the mystique of his much-discussed, but largely unknown, personal life.

Rumours abounded of secret marriages and all sorts of exciting things. "But he concentrated on his art, little else really. He knew the limitations imposed by his illness. Of course he would have liked to get married, but those rumours of his marrying secretly are ridiculous. He'd say, what I really need is a nurse." Aliyya went to London with him every year after the serious nature of his hepatic illness became clear.

"It was very early in 1951 that he knew he had bilharzia. The bleeding started then. That was why he was always so afraid to go to sleep at night, in case he had a haemorrhage and the rest of the house was asleep. He'd stay awake all night, and then sleep at dawn, till around three or four in the afternoon. With time, he became irritable, because of the constant need to take medication. He was a hyperactive child, later all that energy went into his brain, it turned into intelligence. He was very intelligent without being at all the nervous type."

Outside Halim's flat, an explosion of graffiti, scribbled by countless admirers who would slip up to the seventh floor and down again, despite admonitions to the porter not to let anyone up, is still intact. Indeed, the desecration which beset Umm Kulthoum's villa, ripped down and sold by her family for millions, is absent. Perhaps Halim's is the most beautiful apartment in all of Cairo. Around 1966, he commissioned Fouad Serageddin Pasha to supervise redecoration works. Aliyya had the Aubusson re-holstered a couple of years ago: "It was really worn out, because of the countless visitors who come in." She had the parquet totally redone. But the exquisite cream paint on the ceiling and the walls is starting to peel. "People tell me I should keep it that way, in his memory. But I'll have it repainted in exactly the same shade, I don't think Halim would have liked to see it like this." The main entrance is in two shades of brown. She will have it repainted in a lighter hue.

She gave away most of his clothes. She even gave away two closets full of medicines. But the bedroom is as it has always been. On the *bahut*, before the gilt-trimmed mirror, stand half-empty bottles of Bogart for Men Lotion, Ecrinal and Yardley Black Label. The white sofas and yellow satin are as they were. She keeps the silk bedspread clean and ironed, and changes the linen every week. There is a trace, on the upholstered bedstead, of where he used to rest his head. He spent so much time thinking, dreaming and reading there — so much of his life.

He would often step out onto the sky-blue linoleum of the balcony. He'd lie down on the cushions of the stone bench. Young men, climbing up the highest tree in the Fish Gardens just to catch a glimpse of him, would call and wave. The wind and sun played with the fringes of the awning. It gives her satisfaction that, after twenty years, the fervour Halim inspired remains, unabated.

Profile by ***Aziza Sami***

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris



photo: Mohamed Wassim

Tharwat Okasha: mixing culture and technology

♥ Wouldn't you love to have the world's masterpieces literally at your fingertips my little lambs and have Boticelli, Leonardo da Vinci et al, gracing the little screen of your studies? Well, you will soon be able to have that and more, courtesy of my good friend **Hisham El-Sherif**, director of the Regional Information Technology and Software Engineering Centre (a mouthful, but you are allowed to call it *RITSEC*). During a most interesting conference, **Hisham** unveiled the first-born of a series of CD-ROMs produced by the centre, honouring **Tharwat Okasha**—who was smiling modestly—for his life-long efforts in the promotion of art and culture. As an example of what we can expect of technology, **Hisham** has input one of Okasha's tomes, the one on the painters of the Renaissance on CD-ROM. He told me that he intends to do the same with the 23 volumes of Okasha's artistic encyclopedia to be distributed to national libraries and maybe later produced commercially. Imagine my little dollies, you no longer need to take a flying leap to the Louvre or the Prado. With a flick of your little finger, you introduce your CD-ROM in your computer and, presto, there is Tharwat Okasha's soft voice explaining every detail of the three-dimensional exact replicas of the world's masterpieces, accompanied by famous chamber music ensembles playing 17th century pieces in the background. **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** was leaning forward during the whole presentation, intent on enjoying every minute of the extraordinary show, while **Milad Hanna** nodded his agreement. After tickling our eyes and ears so pleasantly, **Hussein Bikar**, **Tarek Ali Hassan**, **Youssef Francis** and **Abdel-Hadi El-Bakkar** stimulated our intelligence with a discussion on Okasha's oeuvre.